

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



**Swami Vivekananda and
Future Challenges to Religion**

January 2014

Vol. 119, No. 1

₹ 200.00

THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Universal Religion*

WHAT then do I mean by the ideal of a universal religion? I do not mean any one universal philosophy, or any one universal mythology, or any one universal ritual held alike by all; for I know that this world must go on working, wheel within wheel, this intricate mass of machinery, most complex, most wonderful. Just as we have recognised unity by our very nature, so we must also recognise variation. We must learn that truth may be expressed in a hundred thousand ways, and that each of these ways is true as far as it goes. We must learn that the same thing can be viewed from a hundred different standpoints, and yet be the same thing. Take for instance the sun. Suppose a man standing on the earth looks at the sun when it rises in the morning; he sees a big ball. Suppose he starts on a journey towards the sun and takes a camera with him, taking photographs at every stage of his journey, until he reaches the sun. The photographs of each stage will be seen to be different from those of the other stages; in fact, when he gets back, he brings with him so many photographs of so many different suns, as it would appear; and yet we know that the same sun was photographed by the man at the different stages of his progress. Even so is it with the Lord. Through high philosophy or low, through the most exalted mythology or the grossest, through the most refined ritualism or arrant fetishism, every sect, every soul, every nation, every religion,



consciously or unconsciously, is struggling upward, towards God; every vision of truth that man has, is a vision of Him and of none else. Suppose we all go with vessels in our hands to fetch water from a lake. One has a cup, another a jar, another a bucket, and so forth, and we all fill our vessels. The water in each case naturally takes the form of the vessel carried by each of us. He who brought the cup has the water in the form of a cup; he who brought the jar—his water is in the shape of a jar, and so forth; but, in every case, water, and nothing but water, is in the vessel. So it is in the case of religion; our minds are like these vessels, and each one of us is trying to arrive at the realisation of God. God is like that water filling these different vessels, and in each vessel the vision of God comes in the form of the vessel. Yet He is One. He is God in every case. This is the only recognition of universality that we can get.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.382–83.



**RP - Sanjiv Goenka
Group**
Growing Legacies

Cover Art: 'Eternal', by Atanu Bhattacharya,
Water Colour and Soft Pastel on Board



CESC
LIMITED
Energising Lives - Since 1898



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

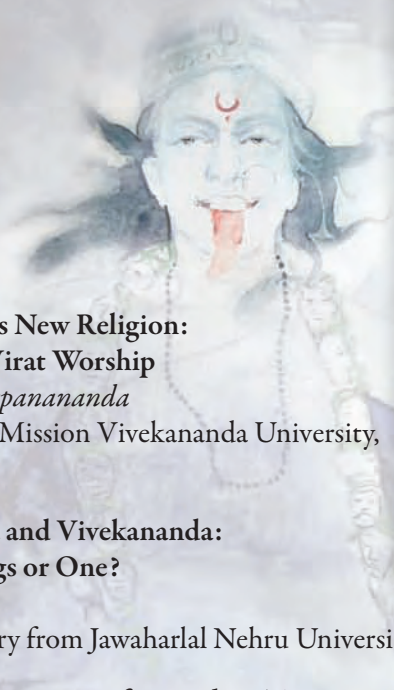
Vol. 119, No. 1
January 2014

Contents

Traditional Wisdom	I
<i>Editorial: The Challenges for Religion</i>	4
Vivekananda's Unique Philosophy of Life <i>Swami Gautamananda</i> Adhyaksha, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai	7
Vivekananda's Message to Humankind <i>Swami Harshananda</i> Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Bengaluru	17
Challenges to Religion in the Twenty-first Century <i>Swami Atmarupananda</i> Headquarters, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math	27
The Dynamics of Vivekananda's Global Harmony <i>Dr M Sivaramkrishna</i> Litterateur in English and Telugu and former Head of the Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad	35
Swami Vivekananda: A Presence and a Power <i>Prema Nandakumar</i> Literary critic, translator, author, and researcher from Srirangam, Tamil Nadu	45
A Youth Speaks of Challenges <i>Atri Mallick</i> Class-II student from Burdwan, West Bengal	52
Swami Vivekananda: A Creative Genius <i>Dr Gururaj Karjagi</i> Chairman, Academy of Creative Teaching, Bengaluru	53



S. Biswas
24/1/14



- 57 **Vivekananda's New Religion:
The Yoga of Virat Worship**
Swami Samarpanananda
Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University,
Belur Math
- 65 **Ramakrishna and Vivekananda:
Two Teachings or One?**
Arpita Mitra
PhD in History from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
- 79 **Vivekananda's Message for Modern Times**
Pravrajika Vrajaprana
Vedanta Society of Santa Barbara, California
- 88 **Exhibition on Swami Vivekananda**
Permanent exhibition at Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi
- 91 **The Moral Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda**
Prof. Dikshit Gupta
Retired Professor of Philosophy, Calcutta University
- 97 **Role of Reason in Vivekananda's Philosophy of Religion**
Dr Lekshmi Ramakrishnaiyer
Assistant Professor of Philosophy,
Government College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala
- 101 **Vivekananda's Concept of Religion**
Swami Narasimhananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata
- III **Vivekananda's Theoretical Foundations of Oneness**
Ben Todd Baker
Graduated from Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island





Swamiji's Influence on the Religion of the Future

Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana

Vivekananda Retreat, Ridgely, New York

Swami Vivekananda: 116

Bridging Tradition and Modernity

Benulal Dhar

Associate Professor of Philosophy, Sukanta Mahavidyalaya, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal

The Open Arms of Religious Congeniality 131

Babaji Bob Kindler

Spiritual Director, Sarada-Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Association of Oregon

Vivekananda's Ideas Applied to Science 143

Dr Ananda Mohan Ghosh and Dr Ashok Banerji

Dr Ghosh, retired Professor of Computer Science and Consultant;
Dr Banerji, Professor, Jones International University, Denver, Colorado

Role of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in Human Development 153

Dr Anil Baran Ray and Dr Sukanya Ray

Dr Anil Ray, retired Professor of Political Science, University of Burdwan, West Bengal;
Dr Sukanya Ray, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Lady Brabourne College, Kolkata

Reviews 159

Reports 163

FIRST PAGE: 'AT LONDON', BY G BISWAS - MIXED MEDIA
SECOND PAGE: 'VIVEKANANDA AND KALI', BY SANTANU MAROTKAR - WATERCOLOUR
THIS PAGE: 'KALI THE MOTHER', BY INDRANI SENGUPTA - WATERCOLOUR (WASH)

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

Vol. 119, No. 1 January 2014

Managing Editor
Swami Tattwavidananda

Editor
Swami Satyamayananda

Associate Editor and Design
Swami Madhurananda

Proofreading
Sabra and Vriju Aswani

Production Editor
Swami Narasimhananda

Cover Design
Alimpan Ghosh

General Assistance
Swami Vimohananda
Swami Vibhatmananda

Circulation
Indrajit Sinha
Tapas Jana

EDITORIAL OFFICE
Prabuddha Bharata
Advaita Ashrama
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt Champawat · 262 524
Uttarakhand, India
prabuddhabharata@gmail.com
pb@advaitaashrama.org

Printed and Published by
Swami Atmalokananda

PUBLICATION OFFICE
Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road
Kolkata · 700 014
West Bengal, India
Tel: 91 · 33 · 2289 0898 / 2284 0210
2286 6450 / 2286 6483
mail@advaitaashrama.org

INTERNET EDITION
www.advaitaashrama.org





TO OUR READERS

More than a century ago Swami Vivekananda said: 'Problems that were only national twenty years ago can no more be solved on national grounds only. They are assuming huge proportions, gigantic shapes. They can only be solved when looked at in the broader light of international grounds.' Swamiji's prediction has come true, and today enlightened organizations and people are tackling these universal challenges through universal solutions. Some of these challenges discussed in global forums for serious checks and balances are global warming, environmental desiccation, gender parity, minority rights, governance, welcoming cultural diversity, ethics, business, finance, military, and media. And topping this list is religion, which is being increasingly scrutinized and studied.

Every field of human endeavour is now challenging the old modes of actualizing religious principles. If the different religions, which many a time are judged as obstructions to human progress, cannot meet the multiple challenges of today, they will soon be relegated to irrelevance. In the past challenge to and dissent of the prevailing religion were quashed by religious institutions through their powerful monolithic structures. Today, fortunately, this attitude does not work, and when any action in this direction is attempted, the reactions are felt globally.

Swamiji envisioned and addressed many of these problems. His prophetic teachings are germane to all religions, if they are to survive and grow. This is one of the reasons why your journal *Prabuddha Bharata* found it imperative to dedicate this January 2014 special issue to **Swami Vivekananda and Future Challenges to Religion**. *Prabuddha Bharata*, which was started by Swamiji in 1896, enters its 119th year of publication, and this special issue, printed for the first time in four colours, is one more humble offering to the concluding phase of Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary. Articles in this issue address the challenges to religion and the way to direct them in favour of the spiritual side of religion.

We are beholden to the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, for permitting us to use many of the arts displayed in its museum and art gallery during the 2013 exhibition titled *Renaissance of India and the World: Life and Mission of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda*. We also like to acknowledge the staff, authors, publishers, reviewers, contributors, proofreaders, advertisers, patrons, donors, web page designers, and well-wishers who have helped us carry forwards Swamiji's dream of spreading the highest human, cultural, and spiritual values across the world.

Subscribe to Prabuddha Bharata

- Become a Patron Subscriber and support the rich legacy left to all of us by Swami Vivekananda; patrons' names are published in *Prabuddha Bharata*.
- *Prabuddha Bharata* subscribers receive 10% discount on all Advaita Ashrama Publications.
- Send remittances in favour of *Prabuddha Bharata* by bank draft or money order to Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India.
Or, **subscribe online** at www.advaitaashrama.org.
- Please note that we do not accept cheques.

Subscription Rates

	India & Nepal	Sri Lanka & Bangladesh	United Kingdom		
Annual	₹ 100	₹ 1,100	£ 18	€ 25	\$ 30 (USD)
Three Years	₹ 280	₹ 3,200	£ 50	€ 70	\$ 85
Life (20 years)	₹ 1,200	—	—	—	—
Patron (25 years)	₹ 2,000	—	—	—	—

Rates for online payment at www.advaitaashrama.org (by credit / debit card)

		India & Nepal	Sri Lanka & Bangladesh	
Annual	(USD)	\$ 3	\$ 28	\$ 32
Three Years	(USD)	\$ 7.5	\$ 83	\$ 90
Life (20 years)	(USD)	\$ 30	—	—
Patron (25 years)	(USD)	\$ 50	—	—

(Rates in foreign currencies depend on current exchange rates and are therefore subject to change without notice)

Information for Subscribers

- Moving to a new address? Please let our Kolkata office know at least a month in advance so that your copy moves too.
- The number on the top line of your address label is your subscription number: please quote this number when writing to us. The month and year on the same line is the last month of your subscription.
- Subscriber copies are dispatched on the first or second day of every month. If you do not receive your copy by the last week of the month, please let us know so that we can send another copy.
- Renew your subscription online through our website.

Information for Contributors

- Unpublished original articles of universal and higher human interests pertaining to religion, spirituality, philosophy, psychology, education, values, and other social topics coming from competent writers of any country are considered for publication in *Prabuddha Bharata*.
- Articles should not exceed 2,500 words. Paucity of

space precludes acceptance of longer articles for publication, except in rare cases. Articles must be submitted in typed—and preferably electronic—form.

- For all quotations in articles, adequate references—including name of author, title/publication, publisher with address, year of publication, and page number(s)—should be provided. Internet references should include name of author, website publisher, date, and *full URL*.
- The Editor does not accept responsibility for views expressed in any articles.
- Unsolicited articles are not individually acknowledged. The Editor will contact the contributor if an article is taken up for publication. Email addresses should be furnished where possible.
- The Editor reserves the right to accept, reject, or effect necessary changes in articles on which no correspondence is possible.
- *Prabuddha Bharata* does not undertake to return unsolicited materials.
- Articles published in *Prabuddha Bharata* cannot be reproduced elsewhere without written permission from the Managing Editor.

You know

how important

Prabuddha Bharata is

in spreading the spiritual nectar of the Ramakrishna movement, the invigorating ideas of Vedanta, and the insights of Indian values and culture. *Prabuddha Bharata* also brings you inspirational reading material on a wide variety of topics of global interest.

You value this journal and the cause it represents, and would surely like to share it with others.



How you can contribute:

- **Gift** subscriptions to your friends and family, and encourage your thinking friends to subscribe.
- **Sponsor** a subscription for a worthy library or institution known to you, or let us choose one.
- **Contribute** to the **Prabuddha Bharata Permanent Fund** and help ensure the longevity of the journal.
- **Advertise** your company in the *Prabuddha Bharata* and encourage your colleagues to do so.



**PRABUDDHA
BHARATA**
or AWAKENED INDIA

Send to:

**Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road
Kolkata 700 014**

Yes, I would like to

- ☐ **Gift** ___ *life subscriptions to Prabuddha Bharata at ₹ 1200 each*
- ☐ **Sponsor** ___ *libraries and institutions for 20 years at ₹ 1200 each*
- ☐ **Donate** ₹ _____ *to the Prabuddha Bharata Permanent Fund*

Amount of ₹ _____ is enclosed herewith by draft / money order

PLEASE PRINT IN BLOCK LETTERS

Send my gift subscriptions to:

Your Name _____
Address _____

PIN _____

Email address _____

Phone No _____

Date _____

Details of DD _____



SHARE YOUR LEARNING EXPERIENCE !

GIFT

**PRABUDDHA
BHARATA**
or AWAKENED INDIA

TO LIBRARIES

**PRABUDDHA BHARATA
LIBRARY INITIATIVE**

Let many more benefit from the thought-provoking contents read by you every month in Prabuddha Bharata. Join the Prabuddha Bharata Library Initiative by gifting a life subscription to a library. You can either gift it to the library of your choice or to the library selected by us. Come, sponsor as many libraries as you can and spread the ethos of Indian Culture.

Prabuddha Bharata Library Initiative:

Name of Sponsor

159. R S Shankar, Bengaluru.

Beneficiary Library

Sri Viveka Vidyalaya, Mysore.

Prabuddha Bharata Patron Subscribers:

495. Akhil Kodali, Hyderabad.

496. A N Kagalkar, Mysore.

497. Prof Mridul Sankar Banik, Kolkata.

498. Dipti Rani De, Midnapore.

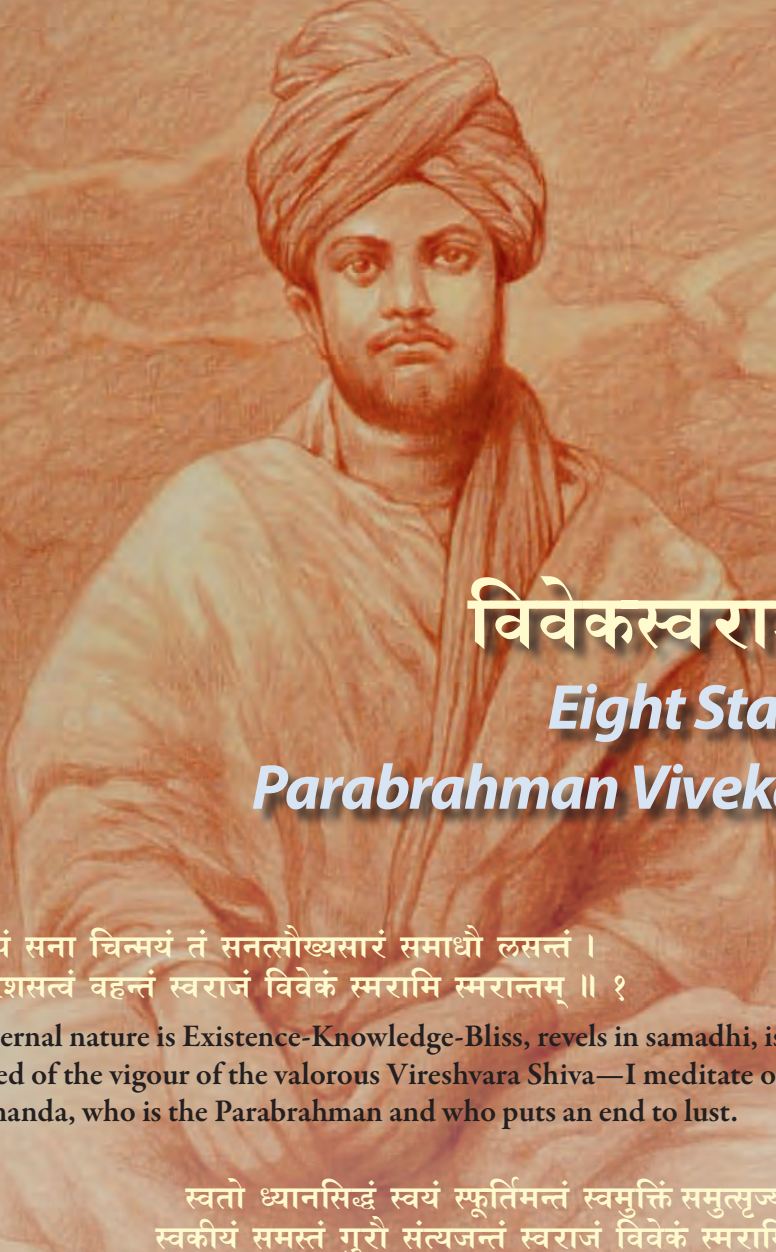
Send my gift subscriptions to:

PLEASE PRINT IN BLOCK LETTERS

TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!



विवेकस्वराडष्टकम् *Eight Stanzas on Parabrahman Vivekananda*

सदा सत्स्वरूपं सना चिन्मयं तं सनत्सौख्यसारं समाधौ लसन्तं ।
सदा वीरवीरेशसत्त्वं वहन्तं स्वराजं विवेकं स्मरामि स्मरान्तम् ॥ १

He whose eternal nature is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, revels in samadhi, is ever possessed of the vigour of the valorous Vireshvara Shiva—I meditate on that Vivekananda, who is the Parabrahman and who puts an end to lust.

स्वतो ध्यानसिद्धं स्वयं स्फूर्तिमन्तं स्वमुक्तिं समुत्सृज्य शस्तं चरन्तम् ।
स्वकीयं समस्तं गुरौ संत्यजन्तं स्वराजं विवेकं स्मरामि स्मरान्तम् ॥ २

He who is perfect in dhyana, self-luminous, does good to the world by giving up his own liberation, offering all that is his to the guru—I meditate on that Vivekananda, who is the Parabrahman and who puts an end to lust.

स्वसत्यव्रतात् सदुहं स्नेहयन्तं स्वतः सिद्धभक्त्या सरागाक्षिमन्तं ।
स्वभावोत्थवैराग्यभासा विभान्तं स्वराजं विवेकं स्मरामि स्मरान्तम् ॥ ३

He who pleased his guru by his vow of truthfulness, whose charming eyes are red-tinged by his inborn devotion (to God); he who shines eminently by the radiance born of natural renunciation—I meditate on that Vivekananda, who is the Parabrahman and who puts an end to lust.

स्वसदेशिकेन्द्राज्ञया सञ्चरन्तं स्वसक्तिस्फुलिङ्गान् समन्तात् किरन्तम् ।
स्वतेजोमहिम्ना तमस्संहरन्तं स्वराजं विवेकं स्मरामि स्मरान्तम् ॥ ४

He who sojourned at his guru's bidding, spread words of fire everywhere, dispelled ignorance by his spiritual brilliance—I meditate on that Vivekananda, who is the Parabrahman and who puts an end to lust.

स्वभूमौ सुजातान् सुमार्गे नयन्तं स्वराष्ट्राभिमानं समुद्दीपयन्तम् ।
स्वधर्माभिमुख्यं समुद्बोधयन्तं स्वराजं विवेकं स्मरामि स्मरान्तम् ॥ ५

He who leads the noble in his country on the glorious path, inspires in people a sense of pride for their nation, and orients people towards their own religion—I meditate on that Vivekananda, who is the Parabrahman and who puts an end to lust.

स्वसंमोहमुग्धान् समुत्थापयन्तं स्वदुःखावसन्नान् समुल्लासयन्तम् ।
स्वसंस्कारबद्धान् समुन्मोचयन्तं स्वराजं विवेकं स्मरामि स्मरान्तम् ॥ ६

He who awakens people from self-hypnotism, cheers those depressed by affliction, and completely liberates those bound by samskaras of past deeds—I meditate on that Vivekananda, who is the Parabrahman and who puts an end to lust.

स्वसिंहासनं तं समासादयन्तं स्वदेशं समालोक्य सन्तुष्टिमन्तम् ।
स्वसंकाशसत्त्वांश्च संभावयन्तं स्वराजं विवेकं स्मरामि स्मरान्तम् ॥ ७

He who is greatly contented with his country ascending on her rightful throne, and anticipates persons of his calibre—I meditate on that Vivekananda, who is the Parabrahman and who puts an end to lust.

स्वशक्तिप्रकर्षैकमन्त्रं स्वनन्तं स्वयुक्तिं समालम्ब्य सन्तं स्तुवन्तम् ।
स्वशक्तिं स्वभक्तेषु सञ्चारयन्तं स्वराजं विवेकं स्मरामि स्मरान्तम् ॥ ८

He who gives the mantra for enhancing one's strength, praises those who depend on their reasoning faculty, and infuses power into his devotees—I meditate on that Vivekananda, who is the Parabrahman and who puts an end to lust.

सेयं सारस्वतीसेवा स्वामिनः पदपद्मयोः ।
स मां स्वाराज्यदानेन समुद्धरतु सद्गुरुः ॥

This is an offering at the lotus feet of Swamiji. May he, the sadguru, elevate me by enabling me to attain the state of Parabrahman.

Brahmachari Bhudevachaitanya
Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University
Belur Math



EDITORIAL

The Challenges for Religion

THE CHALLENGES FOR RELIGION are legion. However, the advance of knowledge is the greatest challenge facing those who believe in God. This threat is serious as many people have built, like their ancestors, their identities on religious doctrines and beliefs, which are now being eroded by the advance of knowledge. As the world is being unified through technology and travel, knowledge is increasing at an explosive rate, being stored, retrieved, and applied. It is being used to further human evolution, dominate nature, and understand our cosmic beginnings. All those distant horizons humans have dreamed of are now tantalizingly close. This human search for more knowledge is actually a search for itself—its origins and eventual destiny. It is exerting a tremendous force on the perception of ourselves and the universe. If religions in the future are to survive they will need to step into reality: take the help of all knowledge instead of fighting it. Swami Vivekananda used modern knowledge in his teachings and demonstrated that all search for truth is an essential part of religious living. This is one of the reasons why Swamiji is becoming more relevant to the world. The worldwide celebrations of his 150th birth anniversary are thus timely and are a harbinger of much good.

Now comes the paradox: the more challenges that are thrown at religion the more there is a revival. Although revival is good it is bad when religions begin to attack higher knowledge and each other as well. Religions have not learnt their lessons from decades of licking their wounds

inflicted by the advance of science and technology. Besides this is not the way of countering challenges methodically and rationally, while holding on to some old books. Every religion has a twofold challenge: external and internal. When internal adjustments are done by harmonizing knowledge in its crumbling structures, external social and cultural challenges will become neutralized.

It must also be understood that despite all advances, a greater part of humanity is unable to relinquish its old ideas of religion and God. People are generally theists or atheists. Some of these folks, instead of staying on their own side of the fence peacefully, have become fanatical religionists or fanatical modernists. The agnostics sitting undecidedly on the fence are confused by the uproar on either side.

The discovery of a deeper reason for holding on to religion will bring much stability in religious lives. But instead of searching for the true meaning, religions are shutting themselves off from a world which is being opened up by science. They do not realize that as knowledge reveals more and more of the universe, the less relevant will old religious doctrines and mythology become. Of course we may laugh at some religions that say the universe is a few thousand years old when it is demonstrated that it is billions of years old. And this is just one of the many inconsistencies that religions are burdened with.

The attacks against religion are necessary but those who challenge it should also know they are only partly successful. There is another side

to religion that they cannot topple and which they blame on people's faith or beliefs. This faith is not what has been learned through a religious education but having a deep sense of conviction about God and the afterlife. If we could only combine the growing knowledge with the belief in God, it would be the greatest combination, one that will propel humanity to even greater heights. This challenge was met by Vedanta ages ago and is why one does not find Vedantists fighting science and new discoveries but rather using science and all the knowledge to strengthen their faith and belief. It is like meeting the challenges against modernity on one's own ground. Most religions that feel threatened are drawn to fight on grounds unfamiliar to them and that is why they fight a losing battle.

Religion, all over the world, developed slowly down the millennia in two distinct lines. One line studied external phenomena and thought there were forces behind the phenomena. These forces, subsequently personified, had to be propitiated so that they could be benevolent to people. Some religions combined all the forces into one supreme power calling it the God of gods. Mythology then followed suit which, in some cases, became a doctrine. This line of religion first discovered the gods or God and then connected it to humankind and the world. Most religions fall in this category. Another line of religious development went from humans to God. That is, they studied life, mind, and soul or Atman. They used meditation as a tool to discover layers and layers of the depths within and used philosophy and psychology to explain things. This line of enquiry proceeded from the Atman to God and established the connection. Thus the most sublime doctrines of the Atman are found in Vedanta. Other religions had just vague ideas or could not conceptualize it. They pinned everything on a God external to them and the world.

It is this conception of God that is being deeply challenged today. Subsequent discoveries in Vedanta showed that the Atman is identical with the infinite reality called Brahman. It is Brahman that has become the world, heavens, skies, life, mind—everything—through maya.

We can now understand why even intelligent people, after knowing that many things in religion are archaic and wrong, still cannot relinquish their intuitive belief and faith in God. This has puzzled not only the agnostics and atheists but the believers themselves. It is the Atman that does not want to relinquish its nature and calls for acknowledgement. Vedanta, which started from this point, built a science of spirituality. Today, science with all its advances is slowly returning to the idea of the Atman, not in the conventional sense but in trying to understand and unravel the mystery, dimensions, and nature of consciousness. Physics, the foundation of all sciences, is searching for it, so is neurology, physiology, biology, and most other studies. From the Atman or consciousness has arisen this universe through evolution. And from the Atman has sprung the sciences, religion, life, mythology, rituals, and everything including God. Religion or truth then is the very nature of the Atman. That is the reason why humankind cannot relinquish its beliefs because those beliefs are part of its real nature. That is why it is declared in the Vedas: '*Ayam-atma brahma*; this Atman is Brahman.'

Once we understand this principle of Vedanta—of understanding the thing by its very nature and not bringing in extraneous agents—everything falls into its proper place. Even the seemingly outside phenomena and powers of various gods, goddesses, demons, natural powers, and so on can be thus explained. Sri Ramakrishna once saw his soul as a flame going out and touching things. From inside to outside! He also once saw the nature of maya: A 'small


light inside a room began to grow, and at last enveloped the whole universe.'

If God always existed, as religions say, so has the universe, only it goes on in cycles. So why do religions not bring the lines of enquiry, of God and the universe, closer in order to find the connection between them? In Vedanta metaphysics God is also a cosmic person Virat, whose body is the universe. This idea is also a simple form of expanding infinitely the conception of a person's Atman encased by a body. This principle was applied to rituals as well; one had to think of oneself first as divine to worship the divine—*Devo bhutva devam yajet*. By showing how to raise one's consciousness, in a yajna, from the level of the body to the indwelling divine consciousness, the Vedas sowed the seeds of meditation and yoga. The most sophisticated ideas of cosmology also came from Indian philosophy and mythology. Where did the universe come from? Today's Big Bang theory comes from the human need to understand its origins. Everything in the cosmos moved in cycles, which science also knows, but Hindus went much further. They designed traditions, festivals, and other forms of religious observances to reflect these cycles. There are cycles of nature, humans, plants, animals, insects, even gods and goddesses. The entire seen and unseen universe moves through cycles lasting billions of years, which corresponds, interestingly, to modern findings. This one cycle is a day in the life of Brahma. Then they went further and declared that the universe is but Brahma's dream and after innumerable days and nights of a century of Brahma's lifetime the whole universe is finally merged in the infinite Existence. Another Brahma emerges from lower cycles to start this dream creation. Vedanta daringly went ever further and declared that there may be *innumerable* Brahmas, dreaming their cosmic dreams. Some scientists today posit multiple universes. Then comes the

final push, a tremendous idea in Vedanta, which says that humankind and everything else may not be the dreams of the various Brahmas but that the many Brahmas may be the dreams of the human mind! From inside out; that is the way of Vedanta.

Hence all those challenging religion's internal mandate were barking up the wrong tree. Besides, most of the challenges to religion were mainly against its cultural and social manifestations that have become mixed with many superstitions. These superstitions of course have to go. It will cleanse religions of all the dross and will lead us to the essence of religion, which is the Atman or consciousness, which nobody can disprove, deny, or eliminate. As the scientific study of consciousness is the fine-tuning of religion through externals; Yoga-Vedanta is the fine-tuning of the study of consciousness from the internal. Both will meet, as Swamiji had predicted, and it is happening now in this age! This is the best time in the history of humanity.

Vedantic philosophy, mythology, and rituals, addressed this central theme of the Atman and its manifestation, the universe. Science will not be out of place in religion but will instead help it. All environmental, social, and other sciences will also find their place and meaning within this grand sweep of Vedanta, which Swamiji had predicated will be the future religion. And just as science speaks of the unity of all things so also the religion of Vedanta speaks of the unity of all things within Consciousness.

This Consciousness or Atman, from where everything has sprung, has also thrown up a mirror, as it were, in this age, for us to see into and be guided by. This mirror is Swami Vivekananda. In him we can see ourselves including the universe or universes reflected. This mirror called Swami Vivekananda is in every heart calling on us, to meet the challenges of daily life, and see the face of Truth known as religion or science. 



Vivekananda's Unique Philosophy of Life

Swami Gautamananda

EVERYONE HAS A PHILOSOPHY to live by; some of these philosophies are good, others bad. This is so because not all people are correctly aware of what is good for them and for society. This ignorance is due to improper education or guidance. Many do not bother to question but remain content with their situations, however crude or selfish. Again, some of these philosophies may not be workable in modern times and some may be too far-fetched and unattainable.

The majority of people have sense enjoyment as their goal, though they may not admit it! Some do everything to gain position, power, name, fame, and so on because they think these are the greatest things in life. Each type has a set of arguments to justify their doings. In other words, they all have a philosophy of life. However, we are shown by sages and saints the path to express our infinite possibilities and reach a state that is universally valued and respected.

The lives of Buddha, Mahavira, Christ, Sri Ramakrishna, and many other great persons have demonstrated this truth.

New Path to Perfection

Great saints and prophets have taught that becoming divine or perfect is the highest goal of human life. All have declared that humankind is heir to immortal life, infinite knowledge, love, and bliss. Though this is very much true according to the Indian ethos, it is also echoed by other great personalities, as Christ says: 'Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.'¹

This goal of perfection is attained gradually after realizing the futility of lower goals such as sense enjoyment and socioeconomic power. We see that people once addicted to sensual pleasures become, by middle age, disillusioned and disappointed with those so-called pleasures. Similar is the case with those who run after wealth and power. Therefore, the wise counsel us

against the pursuit of temporal goals: 'Be spiritual; realize that you are divine and you will attain the highest perfection by knowing that you are spiritually immortal, possessing infinite knowledge and bliss.' They also declare that this goal is achievable and open to everyone. They boldly proclaim that there is no other way to blessedness than consciously choosing and struggling to actualize our real nature. And this spiritual struggle is described in the Upanishads: 'As difficult as impassable as a razor's edge,'² and 'this Atman is not attained by the weak.'³ This struggle is more adventurous, thrilling, and inspiring than the conquest of external nature.

The latest great personality to show us the path to blessedness is Swami Vivekananda. Guided by his Master Sri Ramakrishna, he traversed this difficult path of discipline and prolonged struggles, and showed us its validity. Swamiji expressed this through a unique philosophy of life that promised us peace and happiness in temporal life, as well as lasting spiritual peace and joy.

Swamiji wanted his monastic brothers to educate the masses of India in secular and spiritual matters. He writes in a famous letter of 1894 from the US to his brother disciples at the Alambazar monastery: 'I am giving you a new idea. If you can work it out, then I shall know you are men and will be of service. ... get together a number of poor, indigent folk ... teach them astronomy, geography, etc., and preach Sri Ramakrishna to them.'⁴ Centuries of suppression and exploitation had rendered people helpless. Now, instead of depending on petty rulers and kings or the British to do something, Swamiji wanted the regeneration of India for the people and by the people. He first wanted to eradicate poverty through technical and other secular education, which had to go along with the instilling of spiritual culture, the backbone of India since ancient times.

Swamiji mentions the following special areas of action in the same letter: (i) The need for becoming organized, (ii) electrifying society through one's character, (iii) having thousands of sannyasins and sannyasinis working selflessly and tirelessly, and (iv) starting centres to spread Sri Ramakrishna's life and message. He wrote: 'A huge spiritual tidal wave is coming—he who is low shall become noble, and he who is ignorant shall become the teacher of great scholars—through HIS grace' (6.294). And then, in an amazing display of divine inspiration, he concludes:

'Arise! Awake!' Great Lord! He is at our back! I cannot write any more—Onward! I only tell you this, that whoever reads this letter will imbibe my spirit! Have faith! Onward! Great Lord! ... I feel as if somebody is moving my hand to write this way. Onward! Great Lord! Everyone will be swept away! Take care, he is coming! Whoever will be ready to serve him—no, not him but his children—the poor and the downtrodden, the sinful and afflicted, those who will be ready to serve these, in them he will manifest himself! Through their tongue the Goddess of Learning Herself will speak and the Divine Mother—the Embodiment of all power, will enthrone Herself in their hearts! (6.295).

Swami Vivekananda speaks about teaching history, geography, astronomy, and modern social sciences in order to awaken the Indian masses. He knew that individual happiness rests on the happiness of others, and awakening people was the first step towards an all-round national development. His 'new idea' was far ahead of even the much later communist movements in some parts of the world, which failed because they could not understand the spiritual dimension of the human being. His novel idea was initially not well received by his own brother disciples! But Swami Vivekananda, a born leader, was charting a new path for humanity while

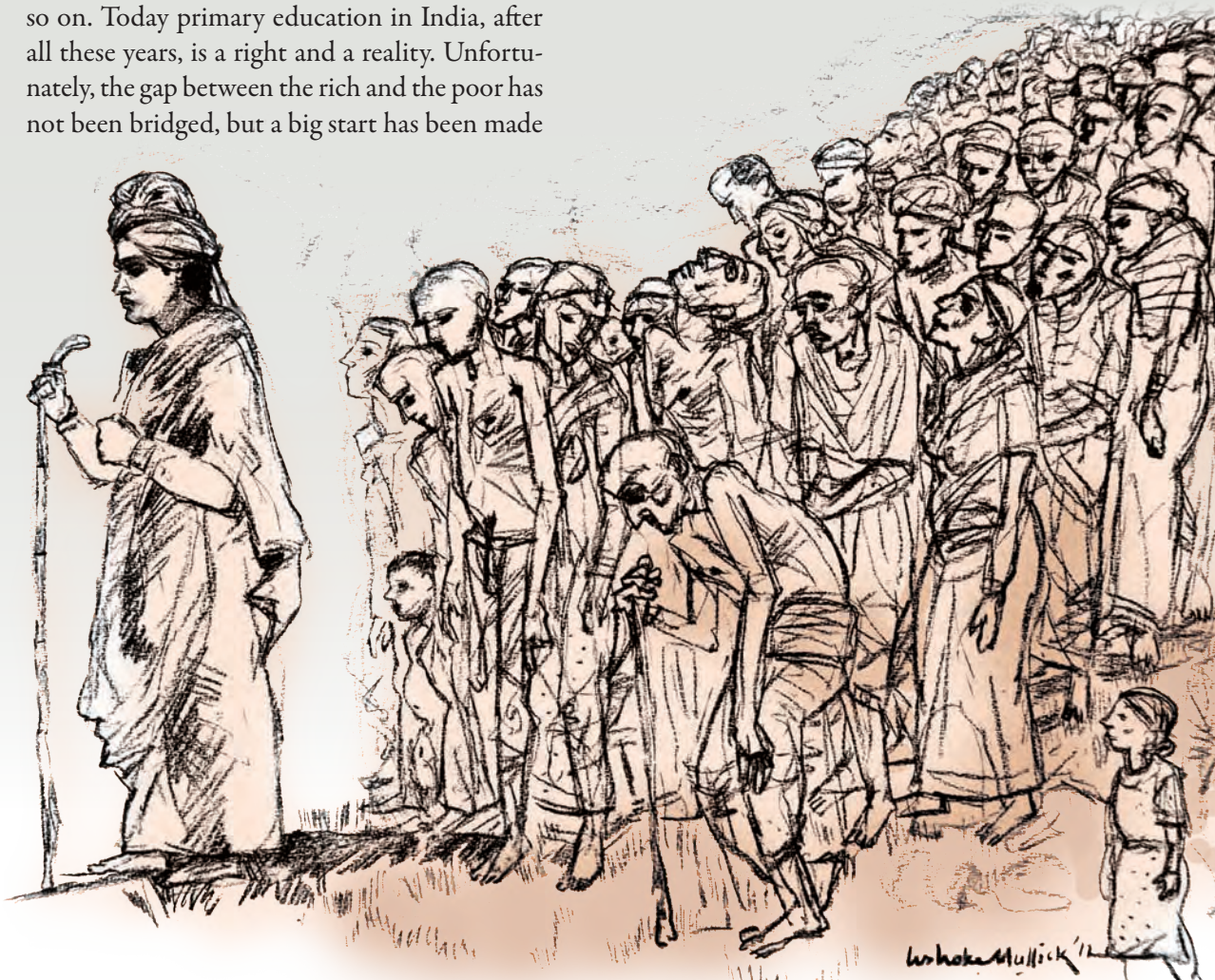
spiritually extending the old ideal of ‘*bahujana hitaya bahujana sukhaya*; for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many’. In a poignant letter written to the Maharaja of Mysore he says: ‘My noble Prince, this life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive’ (4.363). Spiritual life, in the hands of Swamiji, was made proactive and practical through service of the Atman in all.

Swamiji wanted a healthy exchange of ideas between the East and the West. Western technology must be used to uplift the poor masses, and values cherished by the orient for thousands of years taught to the West in exchange. He spoke of mass education going from door to door using the magic lantern, maps, charts, and so on. Today primary education in India, after all these years, is a right and a reality. Unfortunately, the gap between the rich and the poor has not been bridged, but a big start has been made

for the poor to rise and stop being exploited. We also need to effectively use all the technological developments such as electronic media, computers, and the Internet to bring the masses into the mainstream. Swamiji was always positive and modern in his approach, and his followers will also have to be so. Distance education can be used to ‘reach the unreached’, even in remote forest and hill tribes and communities.

Spiritual Awakening, the Need of the Hour

Swamiji wanted to eradicate poverty, but he wanted even more the eradication, through spiritual awakening, of selfishness, disunity, jealousy, and corruption, which can happen. These



stumbling blocks of human progress could be neutralized by propagating the character, teachings, and religion of Sri Ramakrishna, who preached the divinity of humankind, of the universe, and the harmony of all religions. ‘This’, Swamiji said, ‘is the only spiritual practice, the only worship, this verily is the means, and this the goal’ (6.294).

Swamiji’s call for a national consciousness was unique. In his essay ‘Aryans and Tamilians’, he showed the essential unity of the nation and refuted the Aryan invasion theory. He said that the whole of India was of one race only, called Aryan in the North and Dravidian in the South, both originating from the race that inhabited India from prehistoric times.

Next he wanted to arouse the dormant spiritual consciousness of the nation through the re-propagation of moksha, spiritual freedom, and the temporal ideal of intellectual and economic development based on dharma. He wanted everyone to strive for one’s self-realization through service,

renunciation, and sacrifice. This path would lead to concentration, meditation, and realization, which the rishis of old attained through years of tapasya, austerities. Therefore, Swamiji exhorted: ‘They had hundreds of Rishis in ancient India. We will have millions—we are going to have, and the sooner every one of you believes in this, the better for India and the better for the world’ (3.284).

In the slavish, slumbering India of the 1890s was it ever possible for 300 million people to rise to become rishis? The same question can be asked of today’s India, with its 1.2 billion people. Swamiji emphatically says: ‘Wherever his [Sri Ramakrishna’s] name will reach, the veriest worm will attain divinity’ (6.294). This rishi-hood, that is, the ideal of an all-round development of the personality, can be attained by keeping before us the fourfold *purusharthas*, goals of human life: dharma; *artha*, wealth; kama; and moksha.

The quest for the *purusharthas* can transform the powers of the body and the mind into healthy channels of expression, helping thus to reduce distortions arising from selfishness. Let us take up the four goals of life as discussed by Swamiji.

Dharma, Artha, and Kama

Artha and kama are interconnected. Wealth enables one to enjoy pleasures through the senses; pleasures in turn create the need for more wealth. Thus a circle is created of wealth leading to enjoyment, and thirst for more enjoyment leading to more wealth. But the thirst for enjoyment has to be controlled for the following two reasons: (i) The senses have their limitations and therefore overstretching them brings in diseases and premature death; and (ii) sense enjoyment invariably leads to



‘AWAKENING’, BY SHUVAPRASANNA BHATTACHARYA - OIL, ACRYLIC, AND CHARCOAL ON CANVAS

possessiveness and selfishness affecting others' freedom. Therefore, these clashes and struggles would not be conducive to happiness.

Who is to control this thirst for enjoyments? The individual has to do it through his or her own conscience. There is no other way. Dharma should form the basis for the acquisition of wealth and enjoyment. The modern argument that there is no need for dharma or values in procuring wealth or enjoyment seems absolutely shallow. Besides, one soon learns the harsh truth that wealth and enjoyment destroys oneself. The Bhagavadgita says that God incarnates again and again to guide humanity along the lines of a new dharma to suit a new age. Such an avatara has come again in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. In a glorious tribute to his Master, Swamiji declares: 'Sri Ramakrishna, the fulfilment of the Indian sages, the sage for the time, one whose teaching is just now, in the present time, most beneficial. And mark the divine power working behind the man. The son of a poor priest, born in an out-of-the-way village, unknown and unthought of, today is worshipped literally by thousands in Europe and America, and tomorrow will be worshipped by thousands more. Who knows the plans of the Lord!' (3.268).

We infer from the above that Swamiji's ideas regarding the four *purusharthas* are none other than Sri Ramakrishna's, which are most relevant to the present age. It is, as it were, Sri Ramakrishna who speaks through Swamiji, who says: 'This human body is the greatest body in the universe and the human being the greatest being. ... Even the Devas (gods) will have to come down again and attain to perfection through a human body' (1.142). The first duty of a human being is to realize one's own glorious divine nature. To achieve this one should have faith in oneself and in God. 'The greatest religion is to be true to your own nature. Have faith in yourselves! If you do not exist, how can God exist, or anybody else?' (1.483).

We should note that by the above glorification of the human being, Swamiji reiterates that one's caste is not a barrier for the highest secular or religious achievement. This is also the message of the Mahabharata, which says that neither birth, sacraments, ancestry, or studies make a person *dvija*, twice-born, but character and conduct alone does. Swamiji describes how we can achieve happiness in this world: 'Man thinks foolishly that he can make himself happy, and after years of struggle finds out at last that true happiness consists in killing selfishness' (1.84). This happiness can be at the physical, mental, moral, or spiritual level, the durability and intensity increasing at each succeeding level. This happiness is directly proportional to freedom, and spiritual joy is the highest because it gives freedom.

Food, Education, and Happiness

Food is an important aspect of human happiness. Swamiji advises us: 'Certain regulations as to food are necessary; we must use that food which brings us the purest mind' (1.136). But fanaticism regarding choice of food—vegetarian, non-vegetarian, vegan, or 'veggetarian'—should be eschewed. The food that one is habituated to from one's childhood should be good for that aspirant, though after an increase of spirituality that too changes accordingly. Swamiji advises that meat eating cannot be outrightly condemned, in the face of the glaring evidence that among the meat eating kshatriyas are the authors of the Upanishads, as well as avatars such as Rama, Krishna, and Buddha. The majority of the followers of all major religions are also meat eaters. 'Is God a nervous fool like you that the flow of His river of mercy would be dammed up by a piece of meat? If such be He, His value is not a pie!' (4.359). But Swamiji also declares that for a sannyasin, vegetarian food would be better: 'To eat meat is surely barbarous and vegetable

food is certainly purer—who can deny that? For him surely is a strict vegetarian diet whose one end is to lead solely a spiritual life’ (5.485).

Education plays a vital role in making a person happy. Hence Swamiji often called good education ‘man-making’, because it promoted a person’s all-round growth: physical, intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual. He defined education as ‘the manifestation of perfection already in man’ (4.358).

An educated person should develop a strong will power, which comes from the power of knowledge and emotions coming together. This will power should guide one along the right path, to work efficiently, and achieve the maximum with a minimal expenditure of energy. Education should make people good-natured, kind, philanthropic, and courageous to fight for just causes.

As the whole of creation has issued out of the supreme Soul, and the jiva is a part of this supreme Soul, a person has the knowledge of everything ‘hidden within one’s mind’. Education is ‘uncovering’ this dormant knowledge. This concept of education, as an inside-out manifestation, gives everyone the opportunity and hope to reach very high, provided one struggles hard enough.

Proper education develops an enlightened society in which, necessarily, the majority have to be householders. Swamiji speaks about how men and women can live happily in their families: ‘The householder is the basis, the prop, of the whole society. He is the principal earner. The poor, the weak, the children and the women who do not work—all live upon the householder’ (1.45). He continues: ‘The rule for a householder about the expenditure of his income is, one-fourth of the income for his family, one-fourth for charity, one-fourth to be saved, one-fourth for self’ (6.114).

A good householder is expected to earn well and spend well. Swamiji calls this a ‘worship’, equivalent to a monastic’s spiritual practices,

because behind both is the same virtue of self-surrender and self-sacrifice, prompted by the feeling of devotion to God and to all that is his. Again, the householder has to be a person of character. Swamiji says: ‘Chastity is the first virtue in man or woman’ (1.67). The husband should look upon all other women as his mother, daughter, or sister. The wife has the greater responsibility of bringing back a wayward husband through the power of her love and chastity.

A householder should behave towards his or her family members as a ‘nurse’ in a rich man’s house, believing that all of them are not one’s own but really God’s! A householder, to his enemies, must be a hero; he must resist them and never talk of non-resistance. To his friends and relatives he should be gentle. He should eschew bad habits like gambling, company of the wicked, and so on and struggle to earn a good name. The householder’s life is a training in selflessness, service, sacrifice, and renunciation, to become ‘a sannyasin without a garb’ and quickly attain moksha.

While referring to a householder’s life, we have to look at what ideals Swamiji set for women. ‘To all women every man save her husband should be as her son’ (5.412). Women are by nature religious; if they can preserve this quality and simultaneously develop their intelligence through education, they remain a blessing to any society. Women should not merely be an ornament of the house or look beautiful but develop morality, spirituality, and purity at home and at work. Swamiji always praised the role of women as leaders and as mothers. The great sage Manu spoke of the mother as equal to a thousand teachers.

Swamiji had faith in the women’s role of teaching religion and spiritualizing the world. He wrote to a lady: ‘If bold and talented women like yourself, versed in Vedanta, go to England and preach, I am sure that every year hundreds of men and women will become blessed by

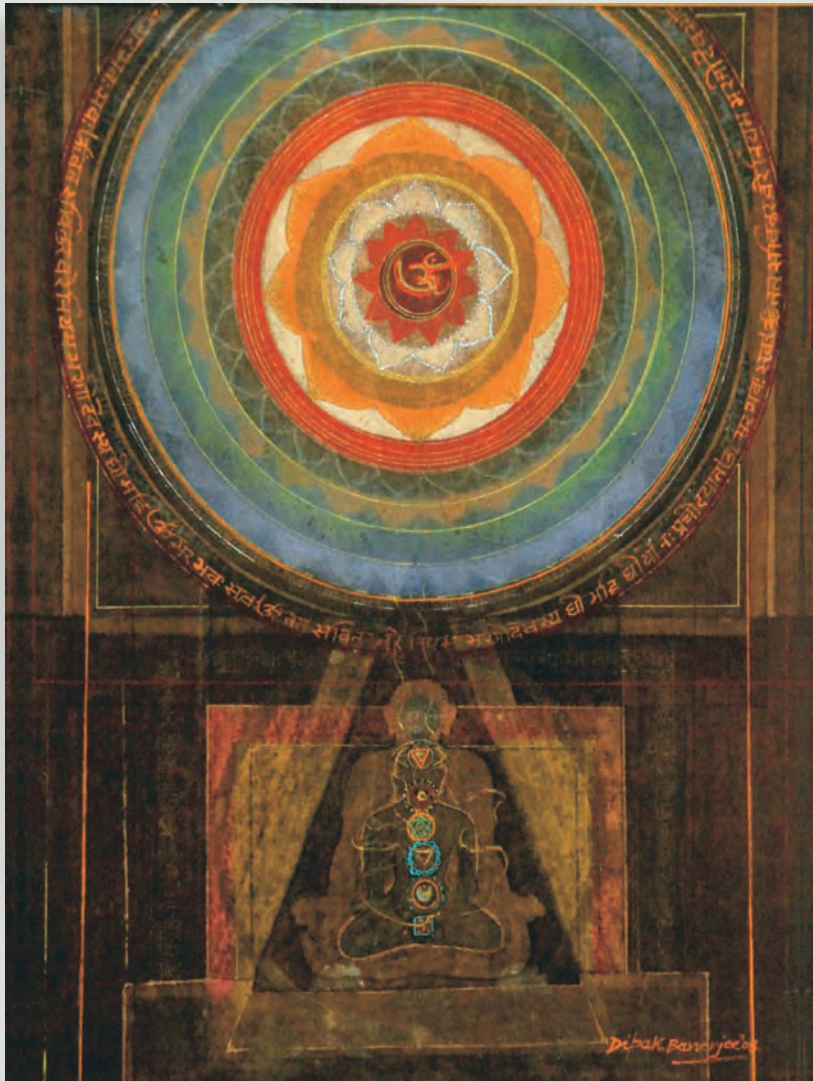
adopting the religion of the land of Bharata. ... If an Indian woman, in Indian dress preach there the religion which fell from the lips of the Rishis of India—I see a prophetic vision—there will rise a great wave which will inundate the whole of Western world' (4.485–6).

Importance of Dharma and Moksha

Till now we have seen some of Swamiji's unique ideas regarding *abhyudaya*, worldly prosperity. Now let us turn our attention to his unique message for attaining *nihsreyasa*, highest spirituality. Swamiji's primary message was to awaken people

to their own spiritual glory. 'No books, no scriptures, no science can ever imagine the glory of the Self that appears as man, the most glorious God that ever was, the only God that ever existed, exists or ever will exist' (2.250). To manifest this Divinity Swamiji advises: 'Our first duty is not to hate ourselves, because to advance we must have faith in ourselves first and then in God' (1.38).

Duty becomes easy if it is in line with our aptitudes. We should select the work we like by nature, to thus serve ourselves and society better. This becomes *svadharma*, one's dharma. This can give us great concentration of mind, purity





of heart, and finally spiritual enlightenment. Swamiji teaches us that every duty is holy and devotion to duty is the highest form of worship.

We are all born with likes and dislikes and hence certain duties suit our nature whereas others do not. Let us not grumble about others having different works to do. That would rouse envy and kill all kindness in our heart for others. If we remember this, we will love our works and our duties will become sweeter. This is how parents love duties towards their children, husbands duties to their wives, and so on.

Swamiji then teaches that real strength should be both physical and mental. Mental strength lies in the faith of our own Divinity: 'Men are taught from childhood that they are weak and sinners. Teach them that they are all glorious children of immortality, even those who are the weakest in manifestation. ... Say to your own minds, "I am He, I am He". ... That is truth; the infinite strength of the world is yours' (2.87). This strength is within; it is goodness, it is fearlessness. That is what our Upanishads teach. Swamiji says: 'The only religion that ought to be taught is the religion of *fearlessness*' (3.160).

Doing one's duties to others by seeing God in them is karma yoga. This makes one thoroughly free from all selfishness. Swamiji considered selflessness as the essence of all goodness. Real ethics is based on the oneness of all creatures. Karma yoga is the path through which by serving others with this idea of oneness, one attains to spiritual enlightenment by developing complete selflessness.

The antithesis of 'oneness' is 'privilege'. The enjoyment of any advantage over another is called privilege. The aim of morality is its destruction. If one is religious, one cannot claim privileges of any kind. Swamiji also says that good and evil are results of two sets of habits. Hence they can be changed by efforts. Evil is a

lesser manifestation of the Atman; good is the Atman more manifested. 'We should look upon man in the most charitable light. ... You are good because you cannot help it. Another is bad because he cannot help it. If you were in his position, who knows what you would have been? ... All the thieves, and the murderers, the unjust, the weakest, wickedest, the devils they are all my Christ. I owe a worship to the God Christ and to the demon Christ. ... All are my saviours!' (2.34).

'This Atman cannot be attained by the weak' say the Upanishads, hence Swamiji exhorts us to have faith in our infinite capacity: 'All such ideas as we can do this or cannot do that are superstitions. We can do everything. The Vedanta teaches men to have faith in themselves first. ... Vedanta says, a man who does not believe in himself is an atheist. Not believing in the glory of our own soul is what the Vedanta calls atheism' (2.294).

And what becomes of a man after attaining perfection? 'The Vedanta teaches that Nirvana can be attained here and now, that we do not have to wait for death to reach it' (5.284). One enjoys infinite bliss and becomes immortal. 'Salvation means knowing the truth. We do not become anything; we are what we are. ... It is a question of *knowledge*' (1.512). 'It is not that when a man becomes free, he will stop and become a dead lump; but he will be more active than any other being, because every other being acts under compulsion, he alone through freedom' (5.286).

Knowing God is a deep human necessity. Those that deny this fact have been proved wrong by time. Therefore, so long as there is such a thing as death in the world, there shall be faith in God. 'The concept of God is a fundamental element in the human constitution. In the Vedanta Sat-chit-ananda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss) is the highest concept of God possible to the mind' (1.334).

Swamiji wonderfully argues that all quests for freedom are quests for God, because God is of the

nature of absolute freedom! No conception of God can satisfy the soul; it needs realization, and realization needs spiritual practices. What are the spiritual practices Swamiji prescribes for realizing God? ‘Be strong and stand up and seek the God of Love. This is the highest strength. What power is higher than the power of purity? Love and purity govern the world. This love of God cannot be reached by the weak; therefore be not weak physically, mentally, morally or spiritually’ (4.60).


This love of God comes easily by serving God’s creatures. Swamiji says: ‘After so much Tapasya I have understood this as the highest truth: “God is present in every being. There is no other God besides that. He who serves all beings serves God indeed!”’⁵

God incarnates as a human being so that humans can have direct experience of the existence of God and his love, compassion, and so on. Swamiji testifies this fact for the modern world saying: ‘Higher and nobler than all ordinary ones are another set of teachers, the Avatars of Ishvara, in the world. They can transmit spirituality with a touch, even with a mere wish. The lowest and the most degraded characters become in one second saints at their command. ...We cannot see God except through them. We cannot help worshipping them; and indeed they are the only ones whom we are bound to worship.’⁶ Avatars are like tidal waves of spirituality that inundate the land and reach every home and person. When we understand this principle behind all avatars, we can be liberal and worship all of them. This attitude removes religious fanaticism, which at present is becoming a major source of discord in many societies. In a unique prayer Swamiji says: ‘Our salutations go to all the past Prophets whose teachings and lives we have inherited, whatever might have been their race, clime, or creed. Our salutations go to all Godlike men and women who are working to

help humanity, whatever be their birth, colour, or race! Our salutations to those who are coming in the future, the living Gods—to work unselfishly for our descendants!’ (4.153).

Who is the guru? Swamiji speaks about it: ‘The soul can only receive impulses from another soul and from nothing else. ... The person from whose soul such impulse comes is called the Guru—the teacher’ (3.45). How to get a real guru? ‘It is a mysterious law of nature that as soon as a field is ready, the seed *must* and does come; as soon as a soul earnestly desires to have religion, the transmitter of the religious force *must* and does appear to help the soul’ (3.46).

Swamiji’s ideas are the essence of all Vedantic teachings. He gave them to the modern world in a language that includes the logic of Eastern and Western thinkers. Swamiji exhorted us to be spiritual first and then try to progress in other fields in and through that spirituality. In this he reminds us of the famous shloka of Manu: ‘The knowledge of the Self is stated to be the most excellent among all of them [sciences]; that is the first of all sciences, because immortality is gained through that.’⁷

We have a unique philosophy of life given by Swami Vivekananda. Let us imbibe his stirring words of strength: “Arise! Awake!” Great Lord! He is at our back! ... Have faith! Onward!” 

References

1. Matthew, 5:48.
2. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.3.15.
3. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.2.4.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 6.289–90.
5. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 2.618.
6. *Complete Works*, 3.53.
7. *Manu Smriti*, 12.85.



Vivekananda's Message to Humankind

Swami Harshananda

WE AT THE MODERN AGE are too prone to modernise too much the message of Vivekananda as if he were a mere political leader. It is forgotten that his main strength lay in the depths of his soul. It was his soul force that sustained a life so rich in events and in external activities. There is hardly a life in which so much could be packed within its span so restricted. His life ... is a priceless possession for India and Humanity.¹

Being a universal man, Vivekananda's message too has to be universal. Its basic principles can be effectively applied to all walks of life, either to solve life's problems or to enrich it. We may now make an attempt to study his message from various angles, secular and sacred.

Vivekananda's Philosophy

Modern people have enormously increased the various comforts of living, to such an extent that they are now proving counterproductive! Tasty and attractive foods are ruining health,

even causing new kinds of diseases. Various electronic gadgets, which have greatly reduced physical labour and mental strain, are contributing to the withering of the body's natural capacities and faculties. Dreadful disport in the guise of entertainment is poisoning the minds of the younger generation. Crime, violence, smoking, drinking, and drugs are eating up a sizeable section of the population.

All this is because people, in their ignorance, have opted for a body-centred way of living, instead of a God-centred life. It is here that the philosophy of life as enunciated by Vivekananda comes to our rescue.

Vivekananda has given his philosophy succinctly in two places. At the beginning of his remarkable treatise *Raja Yoga*, he has given the following aphoristic maxims, which can be designated as the *chatus-sutri*, four aphorisms, of Neo-Vedanta:

- (i) Each soul is potentially divine.
- (ii) The goal is to manifest this Divinity within

by controlling nature, external and internal.

(iii) Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or by philosophy, by one, or more, or all of these—and be free!

(iv) This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

In addition he has also given the motto of the Ramakrishna Order: '*Atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha*; for the liberation of the soul and for the good of the world.'

These five principles condense the whole of Vivekananda's philosophy. They are potentially capable of being expanded into full-fledged theories or even theses.

Science enunciates the basic tenets of a particular field of knowledge. Technology is its application in that field. If one takes philosophy as a basic science, religion is then its technology, its application in practice. Swamiji has given us a lot of material on religion. Some of it, relevant to our subject here, may be quoted.

'Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.'² This Divinity is God. Are there many religions in the world? Swamiji answers this question by quoting from the 'Shivamahimna Stotra' (verse 7): 'As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee' (1.4). He repeats the same idea in another place: 'Religion is one, but its application must be various' (6.82). 'Application' means sadhana or a mode of spiritual discipline. In another place he defines religion as 'the realising of God' (5. 417). Realization of God and manifestation of the Divinity, which is 'already in man', are two sides of the same coin. Incidentally, he deplores religious quarrels, which occur when purity and spirituality disappear (6.127).

What can religion do for us? It brings to us eternal life. Normally, we seek sense happiness. Religion helps us transcend this. Without religion's saving touch, human society becomes a forest of brutes! (3.4).

The final stage of religion is realization of God. To reach this, one has to start with some preliminary steps. Swamiji declares devotion to God as the necessary first step: 'The Chief thing is to *want* God. We want everything except God, because our ordinary wants are supplied by the external world; it is only when our necessities have gone beyond the external world that we want a supply from the internal, from God' (4.19). If you really want God, that wish must express itself in several ways. So, says he: 'Man must realise God, feel God, see God, talk of God. That is religion' (4.165).

Religion in practice is spiritual life that finally leads to the realization of God. And meditation is the means. Swamiji avers: 'The greatest help to spiritual life is meditation' (2.37), especially when it becomes 'like an unbroken stream of oil' (7.253).

Granting that meditation is the means, the next question is meditation on what? In the Vedantic path of jnana, knowledge, it is on the Atman. Swamiji advises: 'Think and meditate that you are the omnipresent Atman. "I am neither the body, nor the mind, nor the Buddhi (determining faculty), neither the gross nor the subtle body"—by the process of elimination, immerse your mind in the transcendent knowledge which is your real nature' (7.196).

However, this is easier said than done. That is why the Upanishads and the Puranas have given us two aspects of Brahman, or God, for contemplation. They are the Saguna-Sakara aspect—with form and blessed attributes—and the Nirguna-Nirakara aspect—without form and attributes. To quote Swamiji:

There are two ideas of God in our scriptures—the one, the personal; and the other, the impersonal. The idea of the Personal God is that He is the omnipotent creator, preserver, and destroyer of everything, the eternal Father and Mother of the universe, but One who is eternally separate from us and from all souls; and liberation consists in coming near to Him and living in Him. Then there is the other idea of the Impersonal, where all those adjectives are taken away as superfluous, as illogical and there remains an impersonal, omnipresent Being who cannot be called a knowing being, because

knowledge only belongs to the human mind. He cannot be called a thinking being, because that is the process of the weak only. He cannot be called a reasoning being, because reasoning is a sign of weakness. He cannot be called a creating being, because none creates except in bondage. What bondage has He? None works except for the fulfilment of desires; what desires has He? None works except it be to supply some wants; what wants has He? In the Vedas it is not the word 'He' that is used, but 'It', for 'He' would make an invidious distinction, as if God were a man (3.128–9).

BACKGROUND IMAGE: 'SWAMIJI OFFERING PANAM AT KANYAKUMARI TEMPLE', BY REBECCA SUDHIR - DIGITAL PRINT ON SPECIAL PAPER

Personal God, Easier to Access

It is the personal God—God with a form, name, and attributes—that the human mind can easily grasp, that the human heart can easily find solace in. That is why Swamiji declares: ‘Brahman ... is too much of an abstraction to be loved and worshipped; so the Bhakta chooses the relative aspect ... that is Ishvara, the Supreme Ruler’ (3.37).

Granting that the human psychology is such that we can conceive of God only in human form, Swamiji jokingly declares: ‘If buffaloes want to worship God, they will see him as a huge buffalo’ (4.30).

Can we see God as we are seeing the various objects of the world? Yes! So, Swamiji proclaims: ‘God can also be seen as a form, just as we are seen. ... This is why Sri Ramakrishna constantly saw the Divine Mother ever present with him, more real than any other thing around him’ (7.58).

He also adduces the reason for this: ‘The personal God is the same Absolute looked at through the haze of Maya. When we approach Him with the five senses, we can see Him only as the Personal God’ (5.266).

To meditate upon God with form or even worshipping him in the mind is perfectly all



right. But to worship him in images made out of stone or metal is certainly idolatry, is it not so? Swamiji answers to this objection effectively thus: 'Two sorts of persons never require any image—the human animal who never thinks of any religion, and the perfected being who has passed through these stages. Between these two points all of us require some sort of ideal, outside and inside' (4.45). If the image or the symbol can bring the living and conscious deity into our minds, so meditation on it can be practised; that is exactly what is really needed.

Swamiji sarcastically remarks that the strong attachment that people have for particular men and women, which does not leave them even when they die, is the real idolatry! Says he: 'Is it not better to have a personal attachment to an image of Christ or Buddha than to an ordinary man or woman?' (4.46).

Images are not normally worshipped anywhere and everywhere. They are ceremonially established and worshipped in temples or special places of worship. Actually, an entire set of scriptural works, known as the Agamas, has grown around this subject, including the science or art of making these images, called *Murtishilpa Shastras*. It is therefore natural for Swamiji to appreciate the spirit behind these temples housing such images. He clearly opines: 'If you look at a temple, you are sure to find a Divine presence in and about it' (5.422). Not only that, he even instructs his brother-disciples thus: 'The Ramakrishna temple and prayer hall should be built together' (2.205); 'Within the temple there would be a figure of Sri Ramakrishna seated on the swan' (7.205).

While accepting these temples and images, he does not forget the main purpose behind them all. So he proclaims: 'All these forms and ceremonies, these prayers and pilgrimages, these books, bells, candles, and priests, are the preparations; they take off the impurities of the soul. And when the

soul becomes pure, it naturally wants to get to the mine of purity, God Himself' (2.46).

Incidentally, following in the footsteps of Acharya Shankara (788–820 CE), Swamiji alludes to the three great gifts God has given to us: 'Three great gifts we have: first, a human body. (The human mind is the nearest reflection of God, we are "His own image".) Second, the desire to be free. Third, the help of a noble soul, who has crossed the ocean of delusion, as a teacher. When you have these three, bless the Lord; you are sure to be free' (7.77).

The realization of the Divinity, whether as God or the Atman or Brahman, which is the goal of human life, can be attained, says Swamiji, by following any of the four well-known yogas, the paths to perfection. He makes it clear in one of his class-talks thus:

As every science has its methods, so has every religion. The methods of attaining the end of religion are called Yoga by us, and the different forms of Yoga that we teach, are adapted to the different natures and temperaments of men. We classify them the following way, under four heads:

(1) Karma-Yoga—The manner in which a man realises his own divinity through works and duty.

(2) Bhakti-Yoga—The realisation of the divinity through devotion to, and love of, a Personal God.

(3) Raja-Yoga—The realisation of the divinity through the control of mind.

(4) Jnana-Yoga—The realisation of a man's own divinity through knowledge.

These are all different paths leading to the same centre—God (5.292).

Ideas on Education

Before a person takes to the path of religion and spiritual life, his or her entire personality should have been properly prepared. Unless the ground

is suitably readied, the seed cannot be sowed. And this can be done only by good education.

After declaring that education is the panacea for all our evils, Swamiji gives a fundamental definition of education as 'the manifestation of the perfection already in man' (4.358). 'Perfection' means the Atman, because that alone is perfect and not the body-mind complex, which is transitory. Since the 'perfection' is enclosed within the body-mind complex, equal attention should be paid for their proper harmonious development.

Here is Swamiji's oft-quoted and famous statement: 'What I want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made' (5.117). In another place he says: 'The brain and muscles must develop simultaneously.' (6.460). And again he says: 'The body is simply a means to an end, an instrument intended for the culture of the soul' (3.78).

But the development of the body is not enough. That is why he stresses: 'We must turn out the greatest intellects in India.'³ Again he declares: 'You must have an all-sided intellect to do efficient work.'⁴ And finally the heart, the seat of all our emotions. Swamiji exhorts us: 'Always cultivate the heart' (1.415). Why? Because, 'the pure heart is the best mirror for the reflection of the truth' (1.414). So, according to Vivekananda, if the educational system gives proper training to all these three aspects of the personality and makes them work in perfect harmony, the human being will be a perfect specimen of God's creation.

The next point to be considered is the content of education, what should be taught, what ideas should be given. It is our mind that collects facts and draws lessons from them. Hence, if the mind is taught the right technique of the art of concentration, then the task becomes much easier and efficient. That is what Swamiji asks us to do: 'To me, the very essence of education is

concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts. ... I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument I could collect facts at will' (6.38–9).

Once the equipment and the technique are ready, what is the content that education should give? The *Mundaka Upanishad* advises us that we should have secular knowledge, to earn our livelihood, and spiritual knowledge, to attain immortality.⁵ Now let us listen to Swamiji: 'The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character ... and the courage of a lion—is it worth the name?'⁶ Again: 'We need technical education and all else that may develop industries' (5.368). But the poor have no time for education, since all their time is taken up by struggling for bread. So, Swamiji says: 'If a ploughman's boy cannot come to education, why not we meet him at the plough ... just wherever he is?' (8.88–9).

Some more ideas given by him may now be summarized as follows: Assimilation of a few right ideas to develop character; a training by which the will is brought under control; the old institution of living with the guru and similar systems are needed. Great stress is laid on women's education and allowing them to solve their own problems. Swamiji dreamed: 'We must have the whole education of our country, spiritual and secular, in our hands, and it must be on national lines, through national methods as far as practical' (3.302).

On Nation Building

Swamiji was a great and true patriot. See what he says: 'It makes me rather patriotic to think I am born a Hindu, a descendant of the only race that never went out to hurt anyone, and whose only action upon humanity has been giving and enlightening ... but never robbing' (9.255). On the other hand he cautioned that patriotism

should not be 'a mere sentiment or even emotion of love of the motherland but a passion to serve our fellow-countrymen.'⁷

To make this service more comprehensive one must be prepared to learn from other countries as well. That is why he is obliged to declare: 'With all my love for India, and with all my patriotism and veneration for the ancients, I cannot but think that we have to learn many things from other nations.'⁸ After learning from others, we must help ourselves. Says he: 'Nations, like individuals, must help themselves. This is real patriotism' (5.109).

If a sick person has to be treated by a doctor, three things have to be noted first: the basic constitution of the patient, what is now ailing him or her, and what is the remedy to be applied. Swamiji realized that India was sick and needed a drastic treatment. But, before prescribing it, he assiduously studied her strong points, so that the remedy could be tailored to suit her constitution. Each nation has a basic or foundational structure of its own values of life. The superstructure, to last long, has to be built on that foundation only. Swamiji had absolutely no doubt that religion was India's basic structure. So he proclaims: 'Here in India, it is religion that forms the very core of the national heart. It is the backbone, the bed-rock, the foundation upon which the national edifice has been built' (3.204). Again in another place he declares: 'This is the land of Religion Eternal' (5.381). He even makes fun of the Hindus thus:

'The Hindu man drinks religiously, sleeps religiously, walks religiously, marries religiously, robs religiously!' (8.74).

If that is so, when is it that India deteriorated so much in the moral and social field? This happened because India gave up the most essential aspect of religion, spiritual evolution, but paid great attention to the formal and external observances, often taking Indians to ridiculous levels. Apart from physical purity, Hindu scriptures also insist upon ceremonial purity in certain rituals. But if this is carried to extremes, it becomes 'a form of mental disease!' (6.320). That is why Swamiji laments: 'Ours is only Don't touchism, only "Touch me not", "Touch me not". Good heavens!' (6.253).



Hindu scriptures advise us to honour the common masses, by giving food and other necessities of life, recognising that God lives in them.⁹ The Bhagavadgita (3.13) goes to the extent of declaring that a person who cooks only for himself, denying others, actually eats sin! But Hindu society not only neglected the masses, it positively exploited them. That is why Swamiji angrily remarks: 'I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed, and well cared for.'¹⁰ Again he says: 'If you grind down the people, you will suffer. We in India are suffering the vengeance of God' (7.279).

Vivekananda has pointed out a few other factors responsible for our degeneration, like speaking and not doing things, lacking in the faculty of organization, forgetting to study our glorious past, tamasic attitude towards work, hating others, building walls of customs, jealousies, and preventing people from coming into contact with other countries.

For an individual, or for that matter a nation, to survive and thrive, six basic needs have to be satisfied. They are food, clothing, shelter, medical facilities, education, and employment opportunities. Or, to put it in one comprehensive term, materialism! That is why Swamiji

emphatically declares: 'Material civilisation, nay, even luxury, is necessary to create work for the poor. Bread! Bread! I do not believe in a God, who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven! Pooh! India has to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread, and the evil of priestcraft is to be removed. No priestcraft, no social tyranny! More bread! More opportunity for everybody!' (4.368).

But he does not forget where the shoe of materialism pinches! That is why he advises: 'By uniting the materialism of the West with the spiritualism of East ... much can be accomplished' (7.284).

In India, religion had for a long time become static and hence it fell. To raise it again, all of us have to become dynamic, active. So says he: 'You all set your shoulders to the wheel!

... Your duty at present is to go from one part to another, from village to village, and make the people understand ... their real condition and say, "O ye brothers, arise! Awake! How much longer would you remain asleep!"

Go and advise them how to improve their own condition. ... Also instruct them, in simple words, about the necessities of life, and in trade, commerce, agriculture, etc.' (5.381). But in doing so, the place or role of religion, as spiritual evolution, should not be forgotten. So, according to him:



'THE GREAT MONK', BY SANDIP KUMAR CHAKRABORTY. - BRONZE

'Religion, as it always has been in the past, must enter the palaces of kings as well as the homes of poorest peasants in the land. ... Religion in India must be made as free and easy of access as is God's air' (3,383).

However, in the field of work some serious problems may arise, which can sour human relationships. Swamiji gives us a warning: 'Take care of these two things—love of power and jealousy. Cultivate always "faith in yourself"' (5,52).

Even while advising us to keep in touch with the outside world and learn from others, Swamiji does not want us to give up *svadharma*, our own cherished values and duties of life. In other words, we just have to integrate those factors we 'import' from others with our own sociocultural body. See what he says in this regard: 'We have to learn from others. You put the seed in the ground, and give it plenty of earth, and air, and water to feed upon; when the seed grows into the plant and into a gigantic tree, does it become the earth, does it become the air, or does it become water? It becomes the mighty plant, the mighty tree, after its own nature, having absorbed everything that was given to it. Let that be your position' (3,381).

But then, who will rebuild India? He gives a clarion call to the youth of the country: 'The hope lies in you—in the meek, the lowly but faithful' (5,16). 'A hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the downtrodden, will go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising up—the gospel of equality' (5,15).

Swamiji is sometimes ruthless while speaking out his heart's feelings. If the new India has to arise now, the old generation has to disappear! This is the roar of the 'Lion of Vedanta':

You merge yourselves in the void and disappear, and let New India arise in your place. Let her arise—out of the peasant's cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler, and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from besides the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts, and from markets. Let her emerge from the groves and forests, from hills and mountains. These common people have suffered oppression for thousands of years—suffered it without murmur, and as a result have got wonderful fortitude. They have suffered eternal misery, which has given them unflinching vitality. Living on a handful of grain, they can convulse the world; give them ... a piece of bread, and the whole world will not be big enough to contain their energy; they are endowed with the inexhaustible vitality of Raktabija. And, besides, they have got the wonderful strength that comes of a pure and moral life, which is not to be found anywhere else in the world. Such peacefulness, such contentment, such love, such power of silent and incessant work, and such manifestation of lion's strength in times of action—where else will you find these! Skeletons of the Past, there, before you, are your successors, the India that is to be. Throw these treasure-chests of yours and those jewelled rings among them, as soon as you can; and you vanish into air, and be seen no more—only keep your eyes open. No sooner will you disappear than you will hear the inaugural shout of Renaissance India, ringing with the voice of a million thunders and reverberating throughout the universe, 'Wah Guru Ki Fateh'—victory to the Guru! (7,327–8).


Swamiji, in his own inimitable way, clinches the whole issue of rebuilding, rejuvenating India in just two words: renunciation and service. Hence he proclaims: 'The national ideals of India are RENUNCIATION and SERVICE. Intensify her in those channels, and the rest will take care of itself' (5,328).



Conclusion

Vivekananda is adored and admired by the poor and the ignorant; if they have come to know something about him, it is because his heart bled for them. Vivekananda is adored and admired by the rich; if they have come to know something about him, it is because they now believe that they are trustees of God's wealth. Vivekananda is adored and admired by the youth; if they have come to know something about him, it is because he inspired them for doing great things in life, so as to leave a mark behind. Vivekananda is adored and admired by the old; if they have come to know something about him, it is because he helps them attain inner peace. Vivekananda is adored and admired by the scientists; if they have come to know something about him, it is

because he had a scintillatingly scientific mind, which would never accept anything without convincing proof. Vivekananda is adored and admired by the artists; if they have come to know something about him, it is because he was an adept in the field of music and fine arts, as well as an art critic. Vivekananda is adored and admired by the pundits; if they have come to know something about him, it is because of his admirable adroitness in presenting even complicated philosophic tenets in a simple and direct language.

Secular intellectuals can admire him because he was a humanist. Spiritually inclined persons can adore him because he was a saint par excellence. All men and women can admire and adore him, because he is a *man* among men, endowed with an adamant will and a tender heart. This is Vivekananda, who inspired, and still inspires, many an ordinary soul to aspire after extraordinary achievements in life. 

References

1. Dr Radha Kumud Mookerji, 'Our Priceless Possession', *Prabuddha Bharata*, 45/4 (April 1940), 157.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.358.
3. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him* (Kolkata: Udbodhan Office, 2007), 261.
4. *Complete Works*, 6.316.
5. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.4-5.
6. *Complete Works*, 7.147.
7. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004), 100.
8. *Complete Works*, 9.272.
9. See Bhagavata, 3.29.21, 27.
10. *Complete Works*, 5.222-3.



Challenges to Religion in the Twenty-first Century

Swami Atmarupananda

FOR AGES THE CHALLENGES to religion around the world remained largely mundane, interrupted occasionally by cataclysmic events such as when one civilization either conquered or destroyed another, one religion tried to dominate or destroy another, or even when a particular religion had to adapt suddenly to drastic changes in social conditions. But then once again the life of religion would settle into a new equilibrium. As the historian Arnold Toynbee has pointed out, until modern times all

civilizations throughout the world and throughout history have been built on a religious foundation,¹ and so religion—in some form—was by and large ubiquitous, like the air one breathed.

Then came the Enlightenment and the ensuing Modern Age, when the challenges to religion took on a new power: the challenges were no longer to individual aspects or customs of religion, or to fights between competing religions, but the challenges were to the existence of religion itself.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda

Both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, in very different but complementary ways, met the challenge of the modern world to religion. Swamiji said of Sri Ramakrishna: ‘He knew

and so is as good as non-existent; and (iii) religion is irrelevant—we can take care of our affairs without reference to God.’³ There stands Sri Ramakrishna, a living, luminous proof that God is, God can be realized, and *nothing else* really matters.

Narendranath, as the future Swami Vivekananda was known, represented the modern mind when he came to Sri Ramakrishna. He was well-educated in modern thought and trained in modern thinking. And yet he came to Sri Ramakrishna because of a deep inner longing for God, a longing that came from his Hindu past. His meeting with Sri Ramakrishna was thus the meeting between the seeking modern mind and the divine response—the meeting between modern human in search of God and God itself. The result was Swami Vivekananda.

Part of what Swamiji did during his active years in the West and in India was to face directly the challenges to religion as they existed in the late nineteenth century. Whereas Sri Ramakrishna knew little of the modern world and its ways of thinking, Swamiji went straight to the seats of modernity—the US and Europe—to face it consciously and boldly. Most of the challenges he faced are still present today, and his answers are as relevant today as they were then. But time

does not stand still. Today, in the twenty-first century, we find a somewhat changed landscape of thought, with some new challenges and some new twists to old challenges. And there is one challenge to religion that perhaps is of prime importance in the early years of the twenty-first century.

nothing of England or the English, save that they were queer folk from over the sea.’² And yet Sri Ramakrishna’s whole life was a response to the three fundamental negations of religion by the modern world: (i) God does not exist; (ii) even if God may exist, he cannot be known,



A Direct Challenge

Most of the challenges to religion today are social and moral challenges, that is, challenges to particular doctrines or practices of religion, or to social and moral attitudes of particular religions. But there is a relatively new challenge to religion itself, to its very existence and relevance—the most basic of challenges. It arose in the second half of the twentieth century, well after the time of Swamiji, a challenge that has only grown stronger in the half century since its inception: the belief that there is no Truth; there are only relative truths.

One might be tempted to say that this belief had its origins in the three interrelated philosophical schools of perspectivalism, deconstruction, and postmodernism. Perspectivalism is often traced to Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900),⁴ but as a school of thought it developed in the mid-twentieth century. It says that there are many ways of looking at the world—perspectives—but there is no objective ‘truth’ behind the perspectives, no ‘thing-in-itself’ of which the different perspectives are partial readings. Therefore, there is no ‘truth’, just perspectives with their constructed, and therefore dependent and relative truths.

Deconstruction began in the 1960s as a philosophical school of literary interpretation with the French thinker Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), but it soon spread to sociology and the arts and even to such fields as architecture. It denies that a literary work, including philosophical works, can have a single non-contradictory meaning. Even the author of the work does not determine its meaning. Rather the meaning is always a highly complex ambiguity made by the stated and the unstated, the intended and the unintended, what is written and what is left out, where even the reader is not passive but contributes meaning to the work as much as the author. Central to deconstruction, as with perspectivalism, is a radical

scepticism toward all claims of truth and moral rightness, and its conviction that there is no objective Truth or Reality to be discovered.

Postmodernism shares with perspectivalism and deconstruction the belief that there is no absolute Reality, no objective Truth to be known, no statements about reality that are objectively true. Reality—what we take as reality—is shaped by the ever-changing historical, social, and cultural contexts within which both individuals and groups operate. Reality and truth are constructs of the discourse that happens within a particular context, and hence they are always subjective. Science outside of its context, for instance, has no more validity than witchcraft or voodoo; to claim otherwise is both elitism and a form of oppression, a form of philosophical totalitarianism leading ultimately to political totalitarianism. Postmodernism thus sees itself as destructive of all hierarchical structures—hierarchies of power, value, truth, and morality. Though most often it is religiously agnostic—it avoids conclusive statements like ‘God is’ or ‘God is not’—there are postmodern theologians who apply the viewpoint to religion in a way that is consciously destructive to religious organization and hierarchy and, hence, authority, thus freeing people, supposedly, to construct their own religious reality free from the judgements and oppression of others.

Of the three, postmodernism is the closest to an umbrella term, indicating a broad modern movement rather than a school.

Again, this belief that there is no Truth, just the relative truths that different people believe in, is widespread among even the moderately educated in modern developed societies. And as I said earlier, it is tempting to think that this popular belief came to the masses through the combined influence of perspectivalism, deconstruction, and postmodernism. But it is more likely that everything—the philosophical schools

and the popular belief—arose together as part of the spirit of the times. That is, there is a larger dynamic in society, a wavelike movement, of which these are all manifestations, rising together.

From here forwards I will speak of the popular belief, not the philosophical schools and movements, as it is the popular belief that actually challenges religion, since educated philosophers are few and far between, and those few are rarely interested in the serious pursuit of religious life anyway. That also simplifies our discussion, since to discuss three different philosophical movements would entail constant qualifications and precise definitions of everything we might say.

At first, this doctrine seems to be very friendly to Vedanta: all truths are relative, that is, they are true for the people who believe in them. Some, for instance, believe in Protestant Christianity—they have a whole set of beliefs, expectations, values, ways of looking at the world, which are true for them. Others believe in Shia Islam and have a different set of beliefs, expectations, hopes, fears, and values, which are true for them. This is true with other religions, atheists, scientists, humanists, neo-Nazis, psychopathic tyrants, and so on. One set of beliefs is just as true as another set, because it is the historical and cultural context of the believers that make each system true *for them*.

But what this means is that there is really *no* Truth, no standard of Truth. All beliefs are equally true, so they are also equally untrue: there is nothing to judge them by other than the belief itself and the context that births it, and none of them points to a universal Truth, to something beyond the belief. This attitude has deeply influenced the ways of thinking in developed countries. Of course, the philosophers are much more subtle and persuasive, though not therefore more correct;⁵ but again, I am intentionally speaking now about the common belief.

Postmodernism for the Masses

How does it affect people today in developed countries of the West, where it has spread among the common people? It is widely considered that in matters that are intangible like religion, everyone's opinion is equally valid. Within *technical fields* like physics or chemistry this does not hold, because it is quickly obvious to all that I, for instance, do not know much about either. Yet, from *outside* the sciences, even the ignorant me can dismiss both physics and chemistry as constructed truths that have no authority outside of their own internal discourse. And when we come to fields like religion or politics or the arts, which, in the popular mind at least, are based on mere belief and opinion, then everyone's opinion is effectively equal. On that basis, there is no religious authority.

A young man who has joined one of our monasteries some time back says he does not want to study the scriptures or Sanskrit. Why not? It is not relevant to him.

'Well,' I say, 'you may not see it now, but in time you will. This is our tradition, and if you are going to be a monk of the Order, you need to be versed in the scriptures.'

'No, my path is different. My path is to question everything, and I don't want to fill my head with the thoughts of others.'

'Well, you can question, that's good,' I admit, 'but you need to know something in order to question, and the purpose of questioning is to arrive at truth by seeing through false assumptions.'

'No, for me questioning is an end in itself.' And so the argument continues, with an adamant refusal to attend classes.

'Well, if you won't attend classes, you won't last long here, I'm afraid. I'll give you time to think it over, but living here entails certain responsibilities, and one of those is to attend classes. You don't have to like the classes. Just

take them as a discipline, and see what happens.'

'No, that's your idea of monastic life, not mine. You're trying to force your concept on me.'

'Yes, but I've been a monk for forty-four years, so my ideas have at least some weight behind them.'

'Not necessarily. I might be far advanced over you, even if I'm just beginning. You can't say that I'm not. You don't know.'

And soon it is obvious that the argument is going nowhere. This sort of argumentation, though not universal, is quite common. That is a serious problem.

Take another example. Like the last, this is from real life:

'Our group', a young man tells me, 'is promoting a new monasticism. We believe that monasticism is a universal archetype that everyone should be able to share in. Everyone has a monastic side to their personality, and so we believe in the democratization of monasticism.'

'Okay,' I reply, 'what does that mean in practice?'

'We believe that any spiritual seeker can be a monastic. They don't need to belong to a monastery; they needn't be part of a formal religious tradition even. All they need is to be seeking spiritual truth.'

'Good. But what about a spiritual teacher?' I ask.

'They can have one if they want, or they can have multiple teachers from multiple traditions, or they can go straight to the experience itself without a teacher if they want to. The new monasticism isn't about rules and regulations. It's about the spirit of the whole thing.'

'Okay, but what are the guidelines of their lives, what are the parameters, what makes them monks?' I ask, still trying to understand. 'After all, a monk or nun is one vowed to celibacy: that's the defining characteristic of monastic life.'

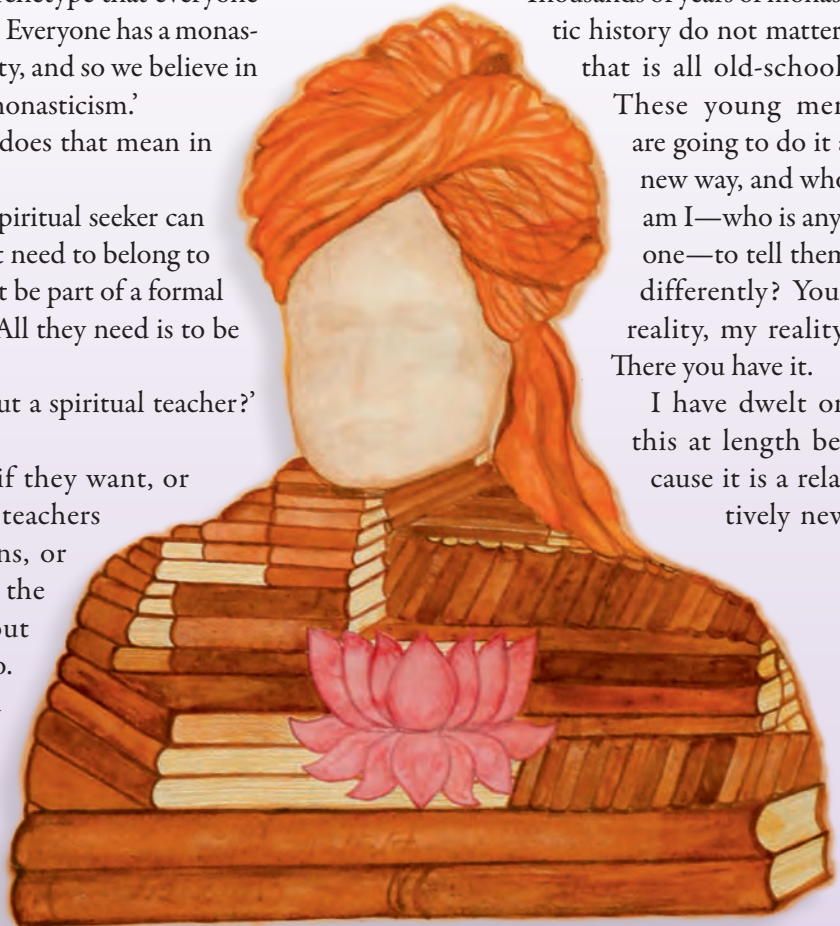
'Oh, not for us! Relationships can be just as important as celibacy in spiritual life. If someone wants celibacy, that's fine, but it isn't required. If one wants a relationship that becomes a sacred part of their path. Even multiple *committed* relationships,' he says, emphasizing 'committed' to show that this has nothing to do with indulgence.

By now, I know the conversation is not going to end in a feel-good moment, nor is it going to end with my convincing anyone of anything. After all, his opinion is his opinion, mine is mine.

Thousands of years of monastic history do not matter: that is all old-school.

These young men are going to do it a new way, and who am I—who is anyone—to tell them differently? Your reality, my reality. There you have it.

I have dwelt on this at length because it is a relatively new



problem, faced so far mainly in the West, but chances are it will hit India and other developing countries sooner rather than later.

The Vedantic Response

The Vedantic answer to this attitude is simple. Much of what the perspectivalists and deconstructionists and postmodernists say has some truth to it, we admit. Grant validity wherever merited. But theirs is a partial truth that misses the Truth of truths. Yes, there are as many perspectives as there are perceivers of the world, and those perspectives are constructed of a complex web of influences. True. Good. But there is a Truth behind all of those perspectives. *All*

are looking at something, and that something is Reality, the infinite Spirit, the Atman, beyond time, space, and causation. Therefore, Swami Vivekananda said once with deep pathos: 'Man the infinite dreamer, dreaming finite dreams!'⁶ *There is the canvas* on which we are each painting our worlds,

and that canvas is the infinite Self, which can be realized in direct experience, not seen vaguely through a constructed, conceptual, relative truth.

How do we know this? By the experience of countless sages of the past, by living sages of the present, and by the small voice inside ourselves that responds to this Truth.

Thus the first flaw in this philosophy is its denial of a Truth of truths, *satyasya satyam*,⁷

behind the perspectives. The second major flaw is its denial of the historical wisdom gained from thousands of years of collective experience in all fields of human endeavour. To keep the discussion focussed, let us take just the field of religion. There may be, and are, many flaws in the religious traditions of the world, useless trash that has accumulated over the ages that somehow continues to float along in the stream of a living tradition along with the great truths, trash like the negative attitudes towards women and the disparagement of other religions. But there is also the wisdom of many centuries: how the great truths can be realized, what works and what does not work, what leads one closer to God and

what hinders, what is a higher value and what a lower. Experience shows that there *are* certain hierarchies—of value, morality, and wisdom—in life that are ignored only at our own peril.

For those of us who have understood and accepted that there is a Truth of truths, fine, no problem; but how

do we communicate it to others who are resistant to religious authority, resistant to the very idea that there is a universal Truth?

There is only one solution, and that is genuine spiritual authority. Not organizational authority, not authority by virtue of position, but the inner authority that comes from spirituality. Those who are not sensitive do not see it, or just avoid seeing it, but those who are sensitive



perceive it, and they are key to preserving the traditions. Just as my ignorance of physics and chemistry is quickly obvious, so someone's poverty of spiritual authority becomes quickly evident when confronting another with genuine inner authority. Even if such inner authority is not obvious to all, it is evident to those who have substance.

And of course, spiritual authority is writ large in every page of Swami Vivekananda's *Complete Works* and revealed in every act of his life. He stands as a bulwark against all such superficiality. But we must do our part as well through genuine inner development. A quiet, steady mind with deep convictions based on long reflection, convictions that have been carried into practice: this gives a tangible inner authority even before we have had the grace of a deeply transformative spiritual experience.

What this means is that those in religious leadership and teaching positions must recognize that the old days of easy authority are largely gone, not because such authority is bad in itself, but because the general population no longer accepts it. This is just a pragmatic recognition of facts. In relatively closed systems like a monastic community, authority will still work somewhat because the members choose to join and therefore have to accept a certain amount of authority if they want to remain together. And there is still the authority of the workplace; just the survival instinct forces people to put up with an authoritarian structure that they may not like, simply for fear of losing their jobs—though organized labour is gradually reducing such authoritarianism in the workplace as well. In general, therefore, easy authority can be asserted in ever fewer spheres.

Conclusion

There are other challenges to religion in the

twenty-first century that should be mentioned in closing. Taking all of them together, they form an interconnected web of challenges. Let us briefly list some that this author has found important, recognizing them to be generalizations with many exceptions and with varying applicability to different countries of the world.

The various scandals that have plagued religious leaders around the world have added to the mistrust of authority and the dislike for organized religion, even in India.⁸ However, sincere people still desperately want *something* they can believe in and somebody they can trust; and if they find something, they will give themselves to it. But woe to the religious hypocrite who takes advantage of such vulnerability: the harm done is immense, and therefore the karma to be paid will be severe.

There is also a crisis of commitment, caused by two factors. First, social relationships have become very fluid, so that marriages are easier to break, responsibility to one's elders is easier to pass on to an institution, commitment to a job is no longer expected since corporations and governments no longer commit to their workers as before. Second, the sheer number of opportunities open to people today reduces the perceived need for commitment: if one thing does not work out, another will, so why limit oneself by commitment? For these two reasons the idea of committing to one thing is no longer as valued in society as it once was.

Add to this the ravages of consumerism, which dins into the minds of young and old the belief that happiness is directly related to how much one consumes. Even morality becomes tied to consumerism, because if one is not consuming, one is hurting the country's economy. Thus through consumerism, contentment becomes the enemy. And on top of this, add the modern five-minute attention span, whereby

many have lost not just the patience but the ability to hold onto a complex train of thought. Add together these three—a devaluing of commitment, consumerism, and the five-minute attention span—and some of the qualities of character essential to spiritual development are undercut. Here spiritual traditions cannot compromise, but must show the way back to steadiness of mind and character.

There are also, however, the good challenges of changing times, which we must accept: the rise of the democratic urge around the world, people wanting to be empowered, wanting a place for themselves in the sun. Religions will have to accept this awakening of the common masses or risk irrelevance. This includes the rise of women, the rise of minorities, and the rise of the dispossessed. Religious traditions must find their own ways to adapt, each in tune with its own ethos and principles and history, but adapt they must. Otherwise the wave of history will dash them against the rocks of time, leaving only ruins for future historians to pick over. For traditions that will not adapt, the quicker they are gone, the better for humanity.

And finally there are the positive needs of a changing world, and these are the same that existed at the time of Swami Vivekananda, needs that he addressed directly. Therefore, it is only a question of time before the world discovers in him the answers to their needs. To list a few: there is the need for a new philosophy of work, in which work is not just the necessary means for making money but a means for self-actualization, self-expression, and self-realization; the need for a new morality, based on the nature of things rather than on a special revelation, a morality that inspires rather than threatens or frightens. There is the need for a new view of human beings that recognizes their infinite potential and reveals their divine nature;

the need for a new view of the world that sees it as the manifestation of God and a revelation of divine wisdom; the need for a new view of God as the ultimate Reality, both personal and impersonal—not different from the soul, the infinite ocean of love itself, not a judge waiting to pounce on our mistakes.

When religion is ready to face these challenges, a new age will dawn.



Notes and References

1. See Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial* (London: Oxford University, 1948).
2. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2012), 2.473.
3. The first is the negation made by atheism; the second, by agnosticism; but the third negation is the most pervasive, taking various forms such as secularism, humanism, the belief in the sufficiency of science and technology to explain everything and to remedy all ills, it also includes some dominant forms of modern Christian and Jewish theology.
4. That is, according to one interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche, there are those who deny that he meant what the perspectivalists say.
5. See, for instance, Noam Chomsky's devastating critique of deconstruction and of Derrida's own writings. Edwin Turner, 'Noam Chomsky, Intellectual Elitism, Po-Mo Gibberish, more Attacks on Deconstruction, and Bad Writing Revisited'; <<http://biblioklept.org/2007/03/14/noam-chomsky-intellectual-elitism-po-mo-gibberish-more-attacks-on-deconstruction-and-bad-writing-revisited/>> accessed 13 November 2013.
6. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 8.251.
7. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1.20.
8. This is of course true of political, corporate, and educational leaders as well, but that is not our concern here, though taken all together this does make for a crisis in leadership in every sphere.



The Dynamics of Vivekananda's Global Harmony

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

IN A FASCINATING STUDY of Jacques Derrida's, 'Religion without Religion', John D Caputo points out a truth that quite often remains contentious, if not totally forgotten: 'One is always working inside a tradition or the institutions founded upon them; it is not possible to work elsewhere, to collect a check without a bursar or controller.'¹ Doubtless this

is irrefutable. But then, in studying Vivekananda today, we have also to reckon with the fact that whether it is tradition or modernity, the new can be drawn from the residue of another tradition, residue that surfaces in unexpected incarnations. From this phenomenon arise challenges from both the 'changing' milieu and its ineradicable bases.

‘Religion without religion,’ for me, would imply religion with its impact and regulatory powers on the four basic motivations of human life: ethics, economics, enjoyment, and enlightenment, besides its spiritual aspects. Obviously, these are the traditional *purusharthas* but with different nuances and resonances as, here, translated into English.

Universal Interfaith Harmony

Vivekananda went to America not as a prospective immigrant but, as we realize now, an incipient prophet of harmony and peace, enhanced with the radiant, revitalized experience of the truths of major religions embodied in and exemplified irrefutably by his great mentor, Sri Ramakrishna. The young Narendra was not a piously submissive chela. He was a fiery challenger of faith-based claims to Truth. And he met the one who affirmed the truths of spiritual experience not quoting texts like a pandit but exemplifying them in every aspect of his life.

Above all, let us recall that on the eve of voluntarily and gently stilling his body into the great Void, Sri Ramakrishna gifted all that he garnered and lodged in his body, mind, and spirit to his beloved disciple Narendra. And in turn the recipient, relentlessly and readily, enriched the world consciousness with the knowledge and wisdom that are required as unquestionable channels for enlightenment. For every major or minor challenge, secular or sacred, evident in the ethos he faced, he had the unique art of transforming them into channels and choices of immense potential. In a situation where the colonial regime, rooted in the ruthless agenda of a company floated purely for profit and pleasure, Vivekananda bored holes through the hard granite of allegedly impregnable intentions of that company and eventually of the empire.

In a revealing insight, Vivekananda himself told about what his stay in the US resulted in. He confided to John Henry Wright, Professor of Greek studies at Harvard, that ‘his stay in America had taught him a great deal. He said he worked on and out of a new way of life: that the practical living in America had brought his old problems before him in a new light.’² In fact, besides Professor Wright we learn that ‘all of these philosophers’ who met Vivekananda, ‘had earlier come in contact with Classical Vedanta’ (177). Was that ‘contact,’ intellectual understandings, what Swamiji himself had and nothing else of Vedanta? Here comes the difference: ‘Sara [Bull] introduced them to a living exemplar, one with whom they could carry on a dialog about modern issues. Vivekananda spoke to them expressing the ancient philosophy in the current idiom’ (ibid.). It is in this context that Vivekananda pointed out the need to ‘address the entire spectrum of human experience if it was going to continue as a legitimate force, and evolve and mature’ (ibid.).

The kind of ethos Vivekananda faced when he went to the US was one of mixed, if not of a totally chaotic, perception of India. One can call it the oscillating pendulum between the atheistic Ingersoll and the smug confidence of a young nation evaluating every other nation in terms of its own criteria of growth and development. Even today this tendency continues. Individuals like Perry Anderson, who, like parrots caged in their own frame, go on sputtering that India is not a ‘nation’ at all. Let alone the concept of nation, for India watchers we do not even have history, only legends and myths. As recently as 2013 Amartya Sen tells us that we have glory—thank God—but, alas, it is uncertain—perhaps if Nalanda University alumni start coming out, the glory would become certain. Even as Vivekananda admired the Americans’ pragmatism, as Marie Louise Burke has rightly noted,

'he foresaw great turmoil and tumult in the coming age; he anticipated gigantic worldwide problems that would have to be faced and solved, and he knew that men strong to the depths of their being could stand up to these problems and not be overcome.'³ The glorious and the gory coexist, engineered by imbalances.

Marie Louise Burke, a meticulous scholar who has given us a vast account of Swamiji's life in the US, and Perry Anderson from California, who rubbishes the very identity of India as a nation—both embody one of Vivekananda's tenets: 'The very basis of our being is contradiction, ... everywhere we have to move through the tremendous contradiction, that wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow, and everyone who smiles will have to weep, and vice versa. Nor can this state of things be remedied.'⁴

Concerning this inextricable duality, one can also cite the paradox of Chicago: the city that was the centre of Vivekananda's emergence as a world prophet has also the University of Chicago, which publishes some of the most offensive books on Hinduism, particularly on Tantra. But then, the University of Chicago has now a Vivekananda Chair! Therefore we have to accept all this with Vivekananda's philosophy of practical life: every challenge is a choice, a channel to harness what is enriching, not enfeebling to our being.

The context now is the enthusiastic, often euphoric, response to Vivekananda. Enthusiasm that goes to the extent of dressing up selected youngsters like so many modern Vivekanandas! Of course, some scholars shy to write about him directly, others feel so overpowered that they bring out studies, individual or anthologies, without little concern for editing. Invariably, the emotions of reverence far outweigh analyses of relevance and its pragmatic potential. In short,

we have jesting Pilates as also jeering debaters—*debating without understanding*.

But one very important present-day 'change' is to shed the usual, unexamined, load of adherence to the Western—mostly Euro-American—paradigms of human development. Once we regretted the word, and plight of, 'untouchables'. Now we adopted, some scholars feel, a strange ethic: studies from the hermeneutics of the West are 'untouchables', you cannot even touch them to know whether they really exist or are mere 'phantoms of the tell-tale brain'—in the catchy words of neurologist V S Ramachandran's books—constructed as universally valid frames of irrefutable relevance to all cultures and societies. In essence, the hermeneutics is like Caesar, impeccable above any questioning or suspicion.

We seem, however, to have woken up to these recurrent assumptions that pass as 'truths'. In his essay in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, 'The Challenges to the Social Sciences in the 21st Century: Some Perspectives from the South', Aditya Mukherjee has noted the paradox that 'when the various disciplines of the human and social sciences, such as history, economics and political science evolved in the 19th and early 20th centuries, much of the present developing world was under colonial rule and European ideological hegemony held sway in most of the world. The human and social sciences in this period remained largely Eurocentric.'⁵ This ended, it seems, with World War I.

Going further (and in spite of the 20th century being called 'the American century') Professor Mukherjee, says, 'Human society from the ancient period to the present, thus, continued to be often viewed, understood and interpreted in Euro-centric western ways. The 21st century will have to face this challenge and recover and forefront alternative voices.' More ambitiously, 'Notions of what constitutes identity, development,



business, the military, science, and the media. More explicitly, in her note on 'Ethics and Consciousness,' Christene Wicker says: 'Respect for religious diversity and engagement with people of various faiths will be an essential ethic of the future. Bible classes that might once have been taught as part of a liberal arts education must be *replaced with interfaith ethics*. This is not to say that the distinctiveness of each faith system ought to be compromised.'⁶

Vivekananda had long ago experienced this vision as a fact. He articulated memorably: 'We must grow according to our own nature.'⁷ Not GDP growth alone, with or without measurement, but growth in 'harmony and peace'. In short, not *sahana*, patiently tolerant, but *samarasya*, the coexistence of the dialectics of contradictions—yet retaining the ability to function.

progress, scientific achievement, secularism, nation, justice, ethics, and aesthetics have to be widened to incorporate the much wider human experience' (ibid.).

Though Professor Mukherjee does not, understandably, mention religion as such, many of the agendas he hopes to get widened can be found in Vivekananda's life and works. And without any self-conscious apologies, our intellectuals may accept reasons why religion matters and needs in-depth study if it comes from the West. In a workshop on 'Thinking Ethics' in Geneva in 2005, the group concluded that in the areas that engage our serious attention for checks and balances, religion occupies the first place. The other areas are

Human Will to Conquer

Benoy Kumar Sarkar, the Bengali scholar and one of the most prominent intellectuals of the 1930s who was inspired by what used to be called the 'Ramakrishna-Vivekananda complex', observed that, 'It is not Nature, region or geography that in the last analysis determines man's destiny. It is the human will, man's energy, that recreates the topography and natural forces, humanize the earth and spiritualizes the geography.'⁸ Citing this, in his study of 'Germanism in Colonial Bengal', Andrew Sartori says that Sarkar 'would thus explicitly identify the technical and economic creations of the industrial era as directly "spiritual" expressions of the "human will to conquer".'⁹

This is a perception that Vivekananda inculcated and empowered others with: 'What we want is progress, development, realization. No theories ever made man higher. No amount of books can help us to become purer. The only power is in realization, and that lies in ourselves and comes from thinking. ... The glory of man is that he is a thinking being.'¹⁰

What are the challenges Vivekananda faced and later fashioned into channels of perennial, integrated art of living in harmony? In his early life he experienced the comfort of a loving family with undoubted affluence. But he tasted the harrowing poverty that human treachery engendered. Relationships with former friends proved futile. Even faith in God floundered. The channel of marrying into a rich family, restoration of familial comfort, was open but never seized. His outstanding intellect and learning did not help him procure a job. And even when his Master assured him that the Divine Mother could come to his rescue when approached sincerely, what he tried, the very idea of asking never surfaced—instead he asked for *viveka*, *vairagya*, and *bhakti*.

The amazing phenomenon that later manifested in him was that of Shakti, power, which was so palpable that when Lillian Montgomery, who was not a devotee, heard Swamiji's public speeches in 1900, expressed:

Swami Vivekananda was so entirely different from anything that we had known in America. I had heard all my life, it seemed to me, of power and repose, and the first time I had seen it was in the presence of Swami Vivekananda. And it all came as such a surprise, because I wasn't prepared for it. ... Power seemed to emanate from him. ... It seemed to me that there was an ocean of consciousness back of Swami Vivekananda, and in some way it focused and flowed through his words ... there was a purity, and an intense power, such a power as I think we have never seen—that I had never seen, and I don't expect

I will ever see it again. It seemed to pour from an infinite source, and it was perfectly calm, perfectly reposed.¹¹

The explication of this 'power' is a challenge to consciousness studies, as also a component of brain research. The *Oxford Companion to Consciousness* states: 'Consciousness expansion, or *extended awareness*, is a rather broad concept, usually referring to certain states of consciousness in which either the self or the space seen around is greatly enhanced or enlarged. These states can happen spontaneously in mystical experiences, they can be achieved deliberately through practices such as yoga, prayer, meditation, and sensory deprivation and they can be induced by taking drugs.'¹² Moreover, 'the ultimate expansion of consciousness can occur in spontaneous mystical states in the form of a complete loss of self and resulting oneness with the universe. In this state there is no individual awareness; rather, one's previously separate self seems to have merged with everything else.' And Blackmore cites William James who pointed out, 'such mystical experiences are difficult or impossible to describe and come with a sense of passivity or surrender in the face of what seems to be true knowledge or insight' (ibid.).

In his massive, meticulous study on Zen and the brain, James H Austin points out that 'paradigm clash' prevents scientists from taking up altered states of consciousness seriously: 'Altered states of consciousness do seem subversive enough to threaten many people's prejudices. Indeed, the few scientists who work in this general area tend to be defensive about their research, because much of it still has to gain scientific respectability.'¹³ In short, they are consigned to the multivocal catch-penny word 'subjective'. Vivekananda's commentary on the *Yoga Sutra*, especially on his experience of kundalini, if

carefully put together should enrich without challenging the current quantum of research—perhaps we may get the complete picture of brain and consciousness.

No Academic Doctrine

Decolonizing the impact of the dialectics of these two phases of Western societies was Swamiji's greatest achievement. Yes, he renewed Hinduism from two blocks: its social imbalances and its mythological and ritualistic hangover, which he renewed by emphasizing the practical dynamics of spirituality. Sister Nivedita has put it: 'His doctrine was no academic system of metaphysics, of purely historic and linguistic interest, but the heart's faith of a living people, who have struggled continuously for its realization, in life and in death, for twenty-five centuries.'¹⁴

Nivedita's mention of 'pure linguistic interest' points to the related issue of Swamiji's choice of English to cast the Sanatana Dharma as a universal practical method. At a time when English was a tool of entrenched colonial interests, including evangelism, he made it the deliberately chosen and dexterously sculpted medium to establish the ancient spiritual truths of India as an enduring testament of global reach. Moreover, his spoken texts—as Harriet Monroe called them 'peaks of human excellence'—recall, though in English, the classical tradition of orality in textual formation. This was a different kind of renaissance, based on harmony of cultures, languages, and religious, and of course faiths. While the oriental scholars had their own agendas—comparable to the evangelists'—with English as the medium, Vivekananda did not see English, as some of our intellectuals see, as 'the lie of the land,' used by 'the intimate enemy' as a powerful 'mask of (colonial) conquest.' Swamiji saw it as 'the greatest gift of Goddess Saraswati to India,' in the words of Rajaji. If we recall that before his very first electrifying



address to the Parliament of Religions, he prayed to Goddess Saraswati, the Sanskrit and the English linguistic resonances effortlessly coalesced to create an instant experience of harmony. English ceased to be the other's tongue, and Swamiji used

it to constitute no less than a New Testament of Global interfaith harmony.

Swamiji said that 'by Vedas no books are meant.'¹⁵ They are revelations, through transcendental states of consciousness, of the truths that underlie creation. In the same vein it can be said that Swamiji's works are not books as such, they embody insights, revelations effortlessly fusing the motifs of Shruti and Smriti texts. Perhaps the apparent corruption of consciousness evident in many fields today is the collapse of what Luce Irigaray identifies as loss of logos: 'The house of language has become a kind of tomb to which it is necessary to give back the semblance of life. The closure of the logos, of the world, calls for contraries, oppositions, conflicts.'¹⁶ Discussing love and hatred, she says: 'The logic of Western culture ends in a substitution of representation for perception' (9). As Dr Radhakrishnan puts it, Vivekananda is 'a spokesman of the Divine Logos.'¹⁷ The Logos has now manifest evidence in books like Philip Goldberg's *American Veda*, which traces the fascinating story of how Indian spirituality captured the West.

This absorption is evident in many ways. At present yoga sustains an annual six-billion dollar industry. This of course reflects the business ideal. Juxtaposed with this is its amazing 'accessibility', an impact that Ann Louise Bardach has noted: 'Vivekananda held the conference's 4000 attendees spellbound in a series of showstopping improvised talks. He had simplified Vedanta thought to a few teachings that were accessible and irresistible to Westerners, foremost being "all souls are potentially divine".'¹⁸ His prescription for life was simple and perfectly American 'work and worship'. Yet, it is inevitable that like tantra, yoga too oscillates between the spiritual and the bizarre psychological—meditation revolutions without natural evolution of consciousness.

Does spirituality or some of its aspects

figure among entrepreneurs? Is there an impact of Vivekananda? We do not know for certain. But the general awareness of rampant corruption in many forms may have made many aware of spiritual modes of taming it. A recent article in *Harvard Business Review* highlighted prayer and its related issues. To the question, 'What do entrepreneurs pray for?' the answer was: 'Unfortunately, we don't know the content of their prayer. Are they asking for energy, insight, success? They're exposed to a lot of uncertainty and risk than the rest of us, so maybe they feel the need to pray more. Perhaps the pressure of starting and running a business to put food on the table heightens their spiritual longings.' And if religion is dismissed or discouraged at the office, 'that could mean missing out on significant sources of employee engagement and dedication.' The research shows that in this regard congregations 'really emphasize work and worship'. In effect, all these constitute the challenge to people's spirituality.¹⁹

If this trend has to deepen and intensify, it requires, both in India and other countries, an education able to instil what Vivekananda crystallized memorably as 'harmony and peace'. In India there are institutes that incorporate these motifs in 'soft skills'. But a synthesis of harmonious learning with English language skills has been done by Lisa Morgan. 'Harmonious Learning: Yoga in the English Language Classroom'²⁰ is an essay with a scope that, though based on physical culture and hatha yoga rationale, goes beyond into areas connected with harmonious living. Learning to live harmoniously through understanding Vivekananda could be in tune with the current pedagogy of 'teaching as understanding' in an integrated way—do our secular policies allow Vivekananda enter the government pedagogic portals, as it happened in the 1950s in Andhra University with the life of Swamiji in Telugu prescribed as a text for degree classes?

Swamiji's emphasis on social reform is well known. And the former citizens on the margins are no longer there. They have achieved a unity that is a welcome, powerful transformative phenomenon. A recent study of Dalit literature highlights that they achieved 'a pan-Indian unity' through 'telling stories, the English language, and translation'. English is considered 'a casteless language'. As Rita Kothari says, 'as far as the English language is concerned its ideological potential to "translate" the Dalit life from fatalism to an identity of rights outweighs considerations of its distance from Indian reality.'²¹ Whatever the nuances, Vivekananda performed the miracle of 'crossing the seas' as also co-opting English as his medium of a quantum of literature incredible in its sweep and range.

We now enter an area that is, in many ways, complex, if not controversial. This is the debatable issue of Vivekananda and the political dimension of a society. Transparently, he cautioned that his followers should keep off politics, and insisted in filling the land with spiritual ideas. It may make us assume that the Vivekananda phenomenon inoculated itself from all political dimensions. True, but there is a far more comprehensive truth behind. Perhaps a clue we can locate in the incident in which Sri Ramakrishna became the Kalpataru, bestower of whatever the devotees present desired ardently. Not all opted for enlightenment. There were those who desired literary renown and other things. What Sri Ramakrishna surely wanted to give may not have many takers. The freedom to choose whatever one wanted does not make spiritual enlightenment primary. In fact, Swamiji once said that religion meant real religion to very few.

To put it more specifically, economic gain, social status, and so forth also need fulfilment. But freedom to choose in such a context, implies that the ends, of what is known as, *nishkreyasa*, ultimate goal of life, remain subordinated to

abhyudaya, worldly prosperity. In today's society secular growth displaces spiritual orientations. So, freedom *as* spirituality and ethics will get sidelined by affluence and the freedom to enjoy it. In a democratic society imbalances are as real, as the GDP—accessibility syndrome shows. Therefore, Vivekananda's freedom was inclusive of the political aspect, without being privileged. It is religion without any of its authentic dimensions put in practice.

Political matters do exist, but their negative aspects have far more effect than their positive. 'Power' has a connotation of going with corruption, and 'absolute power' much more. The antidote to this, if at all recognized and absorbed, is the freedom one obtains from ethical and spiritual orientations. Swamiji emphasized these orientations as an unfailing check to corrupt power. The situations that exist now, with unchecked materialism of enjoyment backed by consumerism, demand such freedom. The inner Being and its ethics are totally unknown, and even when known are dismissed as puritanical.

As a true socialist—a self-described identity—Swamiji held: 'Liberty of thought and action is the only condition of life, of growth and well-being. Where it does not exist, the man, the race, the nation must go down. Caste or no caste, creed or no creed, any man, or class, or caste, or nation, or institution which bars the power of free thought and action of an individual—even so long as that power does not injure others—is devilish and must go down.'²²

Institutionalizing Tyaga and Seva

While Gandhiji 'sacralized' the Dalits as Harijans and Dr Ambedkar 'constitutionalized' their rights in the wake of independence, Swamiji 'institutionalized' the pragmatics of *tyaga*, renunciation, and *seva*, free service. This move of Swamiji may appear as immune from political phenomena, but

citing the above two passages Dennis Dalton says: 'In a broad sense, Vivekananda has often been rightly called a great inspiration of the Indian nationalist movement, as well as of the leading political thinkers of twentieth-century India. He may also be seen, in a more particular sense, as the pivotal influence behind one theme of modern Indian political thought, the idea of freedom.'²³

The Ramakrishna Order is an instance of freedom evolving naturally into a vital institution of *tyaga* and *seva* run according to Vivekananda's inspiration. But a more striking example is Vivekananda's non-interference with the evolution of women's spiritual freedom to opt for *tyaga* and *seva*. If Holy Mother is the exemplar of *tyaga* and *seva*, it evolved naturally into the institutionalizing of those motifs in Sarada Math.

Here we notice the emergence of making social well-being, economic empowerment, and other related areas as indispensable components of *tyaga* and *seva*. While Vivekananda made these integral to spirituality, there is still some hesitation to accept this. But with the advent of a neo-liberal market economy and outsourcing, the model of an affluent society establishes itself firmly. In fact, the Bhagavadgita—Swamiji linked it to 'biceps'—is identified as a source for political thought in action.


C A Bayly is forthright in his comment: 'The revival of the tradition of Vedanta, notably through the life and works of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, posed the possibility of a new form of social and political renunciation and so raised again the issue of the extent of one's duty to society.'²⁴ While this is true, there is also an increasing trend on the part of such approaches to raise the argument that men like Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Tilak derived their 'requisite insouciant confidence', as Ananya Vajpeyi calls

it, to handle traditional texts like the Gita from exposure to Western modernity.²⁵ And it is asserted that 'there no longer, existed the entire edifice of traditional learning with its scholastic, religious, and popular authority to provide any kind of structured and systematic access to the recondite texts' (ibid.). While this is a problematic area that needs more space, for Vivekananda more than for Gandhi, ethical ideas are not just ideas but also guides for practice of spiritual unfoldment, with political freedom not marginalized.

All these issues raise important questions, for example, if the primacy of spiritual growth was the fulcrum of whatever Vivekananda spoke or did. If this is bypassed, the result will be understanding him only in terms of debating. And debate is bound to be polemical. There lies the potential for deviation into, again, the academic notions of the West remaining as primary as they do now. Can Vivekananda be saved from



Western hermeneutical interpretations given their alleged irrefutable primacy now?

I am aware this is an inconclusive ending. But the one thing that I cannot resist from mentioning is that the few studies that venture to mention Vivekananda show familiarity with his characteristic imperative ways. What needs to be done is to evolve a comprehensive map of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda hermeneutics. This is sustained by their lives and, in Swamiji, his *Complete Works* and other sources. The young scholars working within the broad Western cultural and structural paradigms need to look at these issues with a new inwardness and openness, especially to Vivekananda. 

References

1. John D Caputo, *Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1997), 183.
2. Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, *Saint Sara* (Kolkata: Dakshineswar, Sri Sarada Math, 2002), 176.
3. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda: Prophet of the Modern Age* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2009), 27.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.97.
5. Aditya Mukherjee, 'Challenges to the Social Sciences in the 21st Century: Some Perceptions from the South,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 September 2013, 31.
6. *Thinking Ethics: How Ethical Values and Standards Are Changing*, ed. Beth Krsna (Delhi: Viva Books, 2006), 10.
7. *Complete Works*, 3.219.
8. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, 'The Expansion of Spirituality as a Fact of Industrial Civilization,' *Prabuddha Bharata*, 41/5 (May 1936), 413.
9. Andrew Sartori, 'Beyond Culture-contact and Colonial Discourse: Germanism in Colonial Bengal,' in *An intellectual History for India*, ed. Shruti Kapila (New York: Cambridge University, 2010), 82.
10. *Complete Works*, 2.336.
11. Gopal Stavig, *Western Admirers of Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2010), 278.
12. Susan Blackmore, 'Consciousness Expansion,' *The Oxford Companion to Consciousness*, ed. Tim Bayne, Axel Cleeremans, Patrick Wilken (London: Oxford University, 2009), 181.
13. James H Austin, *Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999), 307.
14. Sister Nivedita: *The Master as I Saw Him* (Kolkata: Udbhodan Office, 2007), 192.
15. *Complete Works*, 1.6.
16. See Luce Irigaray, *In the Beginning, She Was* (London: A&C Black, 2012), 5.
17. S Radhakrishnan, 'Swami Vivekananda: Spokesman of the Divine Logos,' *The Vedanta Kesari*, 50/8 (August 1963), 160.
18. Ann Louise Bardach, 'How Yoga Won the West,' *The New York Times*, 1 October 2011.
19. Michell J Herbert, 'Entrepreneurs Feel Closer to God than the Rest of Us Do,' *Harvard Business Review*, October 2013, 28–9.
20. Lisa Morgan, 'Harmonious Learning: Yoga in the English Language Classroom,' *English Teaching Forum 2011*, vol. 1, no 4 (United States Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs), 2–13.
21. Rita Kothari, 'Caste in a Casteless Language? English as a Language of "Dalit" Expression,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 September 2013, 67.
22. *Complete Works*, 5.29.
23. Dennis Dalton, *The Idea of Freedom in the Political Thought of Vivekananda and Aurobindo*, paper submitted for the Comparative Political Theory Panel at WPSA Conference, March 22–24, 2012, Portland Oregon, 16; available at <<http://wpsa.research.pdx.edu/meet/2012/dalton.pdf>> accessed 7 November 2013.
24. C A Bayly, 'India, the Bhagavad Gita and the World,' in *Political Thought in Action: The Bhagavad Gita and Modern India*, eds Shruti Kapila and Faisal Devji (Delhi: Cambridge University, 2013), 7.
25. See Ananya Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2012), xvii.



Swami Vivekananda: A Presence and a Power

Prema Nandakumar

THERE IS A SANSKRIT TERM, *varchas*. Like 'dharma', *varchas* is a word that defies translation, though the dictionary would give several terms like 'vigour', 'energy', 'light', and 'shape'. It is, however, always used as a positive way of praise. If we say someone is endowed with *varchas*, we could understand it to mean one who has an irresistible attractiveness, one whose mere presence is enough for people to draw nearer. That even Swami Vivekananda's photo has that *varchas* was brought home to me by Swami Srirangananda of the Ramakrishna Mission.

'A Guiding Light Awakes'

When I was a child, my parents used to take me regularly to the Ramakrishna Mission in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. The Mission was situated facing the Bay of Bengal. The beach-line was not crowded with ugly buildings then, a clear sixty-five years ago. From the winding road, which was the line that divided the Bay of Bengal from the coastal town, one had a clear view of Sri Ramakrishna, Mother Saradamani Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. The Mission was then looked after by Swami Srirangananda. The evening walk to the Mission was a regular affair. When our parents went in for listening to bhajan and lectures, we had our heart's fill playing on the clean sands of the beach, where crabs made a variety of designs and prickly 'Ravana's moustache'—spinifex—was seen in abundant clusters. Later on, listening to the bells of the *arati* we ran across the road and into the Mission. The *arati* over, the swami gave us sugar candy and dried grapes, the day's prasad. For me this contact with Swami Srirangananda continued for decades. The swami sent me as wedding gift from Ceylon—he was in charge of the movement's work there—a small lacquer cup with his blessings, and both have endured to this day.

Once I asked the swami: 'How did you enter the Mission?' He laughed happily and pointed to a portrait of Swami Vivekananda. 'He inveigled me into all this by his photo.' As a school boy, he had seen in a friend's house the photo of Swami Vivekananda, in which Swamiji was seated on a chair, holding his chin in his hand, a little leaning to the front, the high-necked coat and curls pointing to an unusual personality. 'Who is this *rajakumaran* (prince), uncle?' he had asked his friend's father. The reply was enigmatic. 'No boy, it is not the *rajakumaran* of any state, he is the *rajakumaran* of the world.' Swami Srirangananda told me: 'From

that day onwards the face would not leave me alone and when I was seventeen, I entered the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda world.' I have often wondered how irresistible Swamiji's personality must have been that just a photograph—probably a cheap litho print, which was all that was available and inexpensive in those days—could effect such a transformation in a ten-year old boy in distant Tamil Nadu. The power continues to flow towards us, as I find in his portrait with the words, 'Strength is life, weakness is death'. During the last several decades, whenever I have a problem that threatens to depress me, I have just to look at this portrait and the message. I am made whole again.

It is here that we draw close to the theory of incarnation. There are times when the Earth seems fatigued because of the relentless passage of time, with a variety of forces inimical to human advancement. The need of the hour then is for youth power to come to the fore and lead humankind towards a transformation. It is as though world forces compel the Supreme to send a ray of light, whose mere presence chases away darkness. How does it happen? We have no idea. Suffice it to say, this miracle happens.

In the unfolding process of the Self
Sometimes the inexpressible Mystery
Elects a human vessel of descent.
A breath comes down from a supernal air,
A Presence is born, a guiding Light awakes.¹

With the birth of Swami Vivekananda it is obvious a revealing force had blazed into the earth's atmosphere. India has been a yoga *bhumi*, land, from immemorial times. Even Acharya Shankara, whom we salute as the first to speak of Advaita, was actually one who had come after a long line of Advaita Vedantins. Nor was Buddha the first to speak of the Buddhist perception of Reality, and Vardhamana Mahavira was the

twenty-fourth Tirthankara. The Truth is always there, eternal.

The incarnation comes to brush up the eternal Truth, which has been allowed to catch dust by the animal in man and the *tamas* that rules his consciousness and keeps pulling it back to the nether regions by force. A point made eloquently by the avatara Sri Krishna himself in the Bhagavadgita:

*Yada yada hi dharmasya
glanirbhavati Bharata
Abhyutthanamadharmasya
tadatmanam srijamyaham.
Paritranaya sadhunam
vinashaya cha dushkritam
Dharmasamsthapanarthaya
sambhavami yuge yuge.*

Whenever, O descendant of Bharata, there is decline of dharma, and rise of adharma, then I body myself forth. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of dharma, I come into being in every age.²

Nor was it the Hindu alone who believed in the theory of incarnation who saw Swami Vivekananda as the Divine descended upon earth to lead us from darkness to light. Sister Nivedita reports of the days spent in Nainital with the swami as memorable and revelatory: 'Naini Tal was made beautiful by three things—the Master's pleasure in introducing to us his disciple the Raja of Khetri; the dancing girls who met us and asked us where to find him, and were received by him in spite of the remonstrances of others; and by the Mohammedan gentleman who said, "Swamiji, if in after times any claim you as an Avatara, an especial incarnation of the Deity—remember that I, a Mohammedan, am the first!"'³

India became the blessed land again to receive an avatara in Swami Vivekananda. He cleared the many cobwebs that had obscured

the brilliance of Indian Vedantic thought like Advaita, the significance of our myths and legends, and the aim of Indian culture, which tends always towards the spiritual. He was on a man-making mission and proved that here is a man who is prepared to wrestle with destiny and achieve a new life of freedom for his people. He had come to transform the nineteenth-century Indian obsessed with Western culture into a person of self-sacrifice and idealism. It was a tremendous task, and because he was an avatara, he succeeded in a big way.

'Right through the Circlet of the Gem'

Varchas is vigour, says the dictionary. And the first thought that comes to us when we gaze upon the portrait of Swami Vivekananda and his achievements is a personality of vigour who announced: 'Strength is life, weakness is death.' The swami could be unnervingly nonsensical in his approach. He did not confine himself to small tasks. He thought big, and so were his plans that comprehended the entire humanity. The mission was to be no isolated ashrama-idea but a mass movement that would go to the people and teach them the integral view of work and spirituality. For this one needed strength, skill, and the will to learn and grow. Even the Englishman was not seen as a political oppressor. Why not turn him into a guru? 'Sit at their [English's] feet and learn from them the arts, industries, and the practicality necessary for the struggle for existence. You will be esteemed once more when you will become fit. ... Without the necessary preparation, what will mere shouting in the Congress avail?' (7.147).

Swami Vivekananda's presence conveyed this need for empowerment by Indians before they could look around for freedom. He minced no words in this regard. Describing this aspect of the swami's personality, Swami Chidatmananda says:

Under the prevailing conditions, the Swami did not even hesitate to utter such an apparently sacrilegious maxim as, 'You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the *Gītā*. These are bold words; but I have to say them, for I love you. ... You will understand the *Gītā* better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger.' Swami Vivekananda has often been described as a prophet of strength; to some extent, it is true. His theory was that, to rise to spiritual equipoise, one has to pass through activity; otherwise, one will lapse into laziness. That was the ailment from which India suffered. He therefore pleaded for strength, so that there might be more activity

all around. The Hindus must become more dynamic, more confident in their approach to life's problems; for expansion is life, while contraction is death.⁴

There was energy that flowed visibly in whatever he did or said. In his first address, actually nothing more than a spontaneous response to the welcome given by the audience at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, this flow of pulsating energy can be felt. Only a person with *varchas*, a splendid brilliance glowing in his face, could have risen to his full height and spoken so decidedly:



I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: *'As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.'*⁵

There is nothing childish or curmudgeonly about this pride; this is genuine dignity that rises from a deep meditation upon the subject of his nation's religion. Was he not aware of its drawbacks? Did he not know India lay down in poverty and slavishness? That India was pock-marked by the pest of superstition? India, who was hailed as Mother India, was right now keeping its women in a state of illiteracy and servitude! The less said of the 'touch-me-not-ism' that kept one-sixth of the nation isolated, the better!

Certainly, Swamiji knew many things about his motherland, things that shamed him. But he was strong, undaunted. He was born to change this state of affairs. Meanwhile he must make use of the facets of India that made it an extraordinary nation. One must seize the opportune moment and ride on that force in the future as well. Here Owen Meredith's gemlike poem comes to

mind.⁶ It was a prescribed text for my generation seventy years ago:

Fair chance, held fast, is merit. A certain king
Of Persia had a jewel in a ring.
He set it on the dome of Azud high;
And, when they saw it flashing in the sky,
Made proclamation to his royal troop,
That whoso sent an arrow through the hoop
That held the gem, should have the ring to wear.
It chanced there were four hundred archers near,
Of the king's company, about the king.
Each took his aim, and shot, and missed the ring.
A boy, at play upon the terraced roof
Of a near building, bent his bow aloof
At random, and behold! The morning breeze
His little arrow caught, and bore with ease
Right through the circlet of the gem. The king,
Well pleased, unto the boy assigned the ring.⁷

Here was a chance given to this young man, a mere boy among all those elderly leaders of world religions. But he did not list out the woes of his country. He painted no sad picture of the land that he had traversed through his *parivrajaka* days to excite pity. He was no beggar; he was a prince! The words that marked the beginning of a new age now rolled on with effortless ease, the right message for a global gathering:

The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita: *'Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me.'* Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced

than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.⁸

It is a message of warning but also a message of hope. Like the boy who had won the ring with his tiny arrow, this brief speech had won Swami Vivekananda an entry into the intellectual world of the West. The ochre robed sannyasin's *varchas* had won the day for Neo-Vedanta. He had dared to warn the West, which had prided itself on its superiority in science, technology, and even philosophy. He had also taken the decision to do his best for his motherland, which had become very weak due to internal and external enemies. But what though a few centuries were lost? All was not lost! Had not Acharya Shankara shown the way and rescued the foundations of Indian culture from disintegration? He had rebuilt the structures. Swami Vivekananda would also rebuild the structures. If Acharya Shankara had a limited number of monastic disciples who had helped him in the work of regeneration, he would seek to set up a veritable army of selfless workers to bring back the power and glory of India.

'The Light of Freedom'

Yes, he would need the help of the West to turn his visions into reality. But he would not beg. Why should India beg? She can exchange. She had her immense reservoirs of religion and spirituality, which she could exchange for the material help that would be extended by the West. This was the New Creation to be achieved, and life on Earth transformed into a life divine. It was not going to be done by the flicker of one's eyebrow, but it would be done. Even political liberty calls for great sacrifice, he pointed out in his

poem written to mark the 4th of July in 1898, but indicated the day will come when his vision of global unity and freedom too would be a reality:

Bethink thee how the world did wait,
And search for thee, through time and clime.
Some gave up home and love of friends,
And went in quest of thee, self-banished,
Through dreary oceans, through primeval
forests,


Each step a struggle for their life or death;
Then came the day when work bore fruit,
And worship, love, and sacrifice,
Fulfilled, accepted, and complete.
Then thou, propitious, rose to shed
The light of *Freedom* on mankind.

Move on, O Lord, in thy resistless path!
Till thy high noon o'erspreads the world.
Till every land reflects thy light,
Till men and women, with uplifted head,
Behold their shackles broken, and
Know, in springing joy, their life renewed!

(5.440).

How did Swami Vivekananda appear when he read out this poem to his American disciples as a pleasant surprise on the anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence in Kashmir? The swami's greatness lay in his not resting on the success. One decade of intense activity followed this day in Kashmir, and how much power was packed in those few years! One trembles with astonishment and joy meditating upon this personality. One gains in the process without fail. Swami Nikhilananda reports that nothing could deter Swami Vivekananda even when he was not in good health. Thus, when he returned to Belur Math after his second visit to the West on 9 December 1900, already it was night. The gate of the monastery was locked, for dinner was being served. But the swami simply scaled the gate and went in to join his people. Ah, the joy that must have flowed around in the dining hall at that time!

So much strength, power, energy! Also a heart that was softer than a flower. We have innumerable instances of his love for all humanity and his disciples in particular. No one was rejected by him. Workers for the Mission came from near and far, and they stayed. There were many foreign friends of India who strove to create the new India as the first step to create the new world. Such was his inspiration, and inspiration that carries on even after his withdrawal from the physical. Concluding his biography with the offering of Swami Vivekananda’s mortal frame to Agni, the fire god, Swami Nikhilananda quotes Swamiji’s message, which nullifies the phenomenon of death itself: ‘It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body—to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God’ (5.141). ‘May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls’ (5.137).

That spiritual Power continues to be very much a Presence even today. 

Note and References

1. From Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Book I, Canto 4.
2. Bhagavadgita, 4.7–8; translation by Swami Swarupananda.
3. Sister Nivedita, ‘Notes of some Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda’, in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 9.341.
4. Swami Chidatmananda, ‘A Nation Builder’, *Pra-buddha Bharata*, 67/3 (March 1962), 90.
5. *Complete Works*, 1.3–4.
6. Owen Meredith was the pseudonym used by Edward Robert Bulwer-Lytton, who was Viceroy of India between 1876 and 1880. It was he who as Viceroy read out the proclamation declaring Queen Victoria as the Empress of India. His poems were very popular in his time, and it need not surprise us if Swami Vivekananda’s teachers had brought Owen Meredith’s poems to the attention of their brilliant student.
7. ‘The Boy and the Ring’, in Owen Meredith, *New Poems* (Boston: James R Osgood, 1875), 233.
8. *Complete Works*, 1.4.



A Youth Speaks of Challenges

Swami Vivekananda was a great monk who loved all the people. He did a lot of work through his spiritual powers. Still we are far from fulfilling Swamiji's dream for a better India and a better world.

Today the youth are facing enormous problems. No one has sympathy for them. Everyone wants them to be the best in their field. Parents pressurize them to get good marks, teachers expect the best performance, and society wants them to be useful and successful. As a result of such pressure and a lack of parental love, many youngsters are not very clear about the goal of life. On the other hand, the media, movies, and the bad side of the Internet are doing a lot of harm by wasting their time and by spoiling their minds with vulgarity and violence. The youth also have their faults because they are intellectually immature, with strong emotions and many desires. They need guidance, but they do not want to listen to people who only give lectures and advice. They want to be understood and loved. To face these many kinds of challenges obviously the youth need to equip themselves with 'superdivine strength', as Swamiji says.

The educational system is not helping students in solving their problems, and that is why we need to look at something outside the system for help. It is here that Swamiji comes in. With words that are like fire, they burn in the hearts and minds of those who read them. Where will we get such words? 'All power is within you; you can do anything and everything. Believe in that, do not believe that you are weak; do not believe that you are half-crazy lunatics, as most of us do nowadays. You can do anything and everything without even the guidance of any one. All power is there. Stand up and express the divinity within you.' Most of the literature we find is either critical of the youth or negative about their life. Only Swamiji understood the youth. He repeatedly gave stress on right attitude, positive thinking, and firm faith in oneself. His ideas are powerful and they inspire us to understand our own strength. Holding on to him we can attain success. He was all along an optimistic person. He had full faith in the youth who would do his work. He believed that India has all the opportunities to contribute something fundamental to humanity.

India is again discovering Swamiji, on his 150th birth anniversary, as the real leader of our country's future. After his mahasamadhi in 1902, his thoughts still impel us. Moreover, Swamiji is more important in our life nowadays, with his message for the youth. In Swamiji's own words, the youth need to 'take up one idea. Make that one idea your life—think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success.'

Atri Mallick

Swami Vivekananda: A Creative Genius

Dr Gururaj Karjagi



T

HOUGH CREATIVITY IS a spontaneous mental process, it requires continuous enquiry, expertise in a particular domain, and a kind of developed intuition. Creativity transforms the mind and creative people transform themselves during times of creativity. There is a rush of energy during creative periods that lifts a person far above the ordinary world. One can be actively creative while talking, walking, thinking, speaking, or writing, as creativity has to do with the quality of intuition that one brings into the work. However, being creative does not

always require external actions. Imagine Buddha meditating under the Bodhi tree; although he may have appeared to be idle, he was actually exercising one of the greatest creative brains the world has ever seen.

To be creative means to be courageous, to experiment, to take risks, and create something new. Creativity is the ability of the mind to have a keen sense of curiosity and therefore is not confined to any particular area. Many psychological processes are involved such as cognition, problem solving, emotion, memory, and so on. Creative people tend to be multifaceted and, by harmonizing the various aspects of their being, they can develop an admirable character. Very spiritual people are generally creative and Swami Vivekananda was unequivocally a creative genius.

A creative mind is distinguished by its ability to accept multiple perspectives simultaneously, without getting stuck in epistemological battles. Possessing a sharp intellect rooted in Western philosophy, Swamiji was naturally sceptical about religious claims. He questioned everything and insisted upon proof. Yet, despite being well grounded in reason and logic, his creative mind was flexible enough to eventually transcend the limitations of rationality by surrendering to the call of the Divinity emanating from a poor priest at the Kali temple.

Swami Vivekananda's scientific bent of mind can be traced back to his childhood. In his father's office there were several hookahs meant for people of different castes and religions. The young boy, Naren, was curious what would happen if he touched the hookahs of other communities; would the roof fall on him? Would he die? Initially, Naren's creative mind rejected this. To test his hypothesis, he took a whiff from all the hookahs and then cheerfully declared to his father that nothing happened to him when he broke caste rules. In another famous example of his scientific

leanings, he did not accept the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna without proper testing. This analytical rigour can be seen at every stage of his life.

Swamiji demonstrated his mental flexibility and creative talent in many ways. One fascinating instance comes in the form of his paradoxical personality that held two contrary positions, a commitment for austerity and asceticism on the one hand, and a very down-to-earth humanness on the other.

In an essay titled 'Paradoxical Prophet', Swami Yogeshananda explains this dichotomy:

Swamiji was both a preserver of the past and a harbinger of the future; truth for him did not depend on whether it was old or new. You recall that in ancient Greece, mythology told of a monster called Scylla and a whirlpool called Charybdis, with ships having to ply narrowly between the two. Now when Swami Vivekananda returned to India this is what he said: 'There are the two great obstacles on our path in India, the Scylla of old orthodoxy and the Charybdis of modern European civilization. Of these two I vote for the old orthodoxy for the old orthodox man may be ignorant, but he has strength and stands on his own feet.' Yet the Swami himself was in many ways unorthodox. He saw the Indians of his day as chained—by superstitions, by political subjugation, by sheer *tamas*. He would shock them by crossing the seas, eating food from a Muslim vendor, bringing Western students into high-caste homes, challenging outmoded ideas. He told pupils of a Calcutta art school, 'Why do you always have to represent Kali in exactly the same way: same pose, same ornaments, same expression; where is your creativity?'¹

It is often said that Hinduism is paradoxical due to its uncanny ability to seamlessly harmonize contradictory positions. Therefore, it follows that Swamiji, as the embodiment of Hinduism, would also be paradoxical, favouring

broad integration, transcendence, and inclusivity over narrow, dogmatic, and exclusionary fundamentalism. Creative minds shun the concrete and the convergent for the abstract and the divergent.

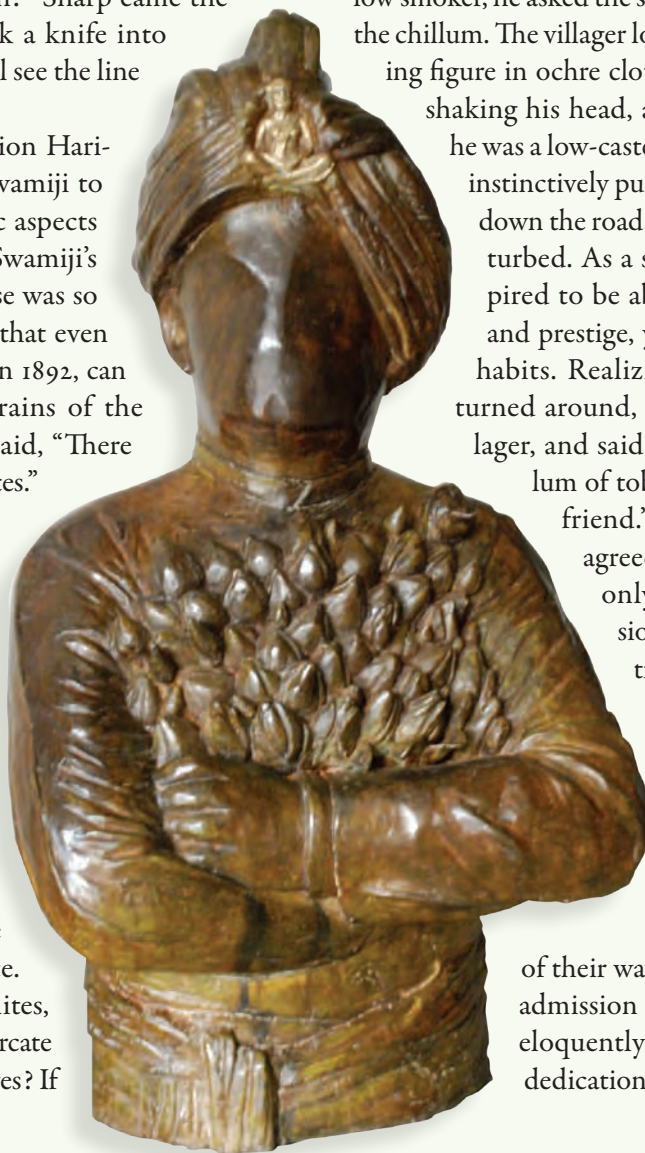
Another way in which Swamiji demonstrated his creative genius was through spontaneity. His sharp wit served him well in both humorous situations and philosophical deliberations. One time an American asked tauntingly: "If all things are one, what is the difference between a cabbage and a man?" Sharp came the Swami's reply, "Stick a knife into your leg, and you will see the line of demarcation."²

In another situation Haripada Mitra asked Swamiji to explain the scientific aspects of space and time. Swamiji's spontaneous response was so lucid and profound that even today, what he said in 1892, can still illumine the brains of the best scientists. 'He said, "There can be no two infinities." When I [Haripada] said that time is infinite and so is space, he replied, "I can understand that space is infinite, but it passes my understanding how time can be infinite. In any case, I can understand that only one thing can be infinite. If there be two infinities, how would you demarcate their respective spheres? If

you advance further, you will find that time and space get lost in each other. Still further advance will show you that all things are infinite, but those infinite things are one in essence and not two."³

Being creative also means being introspective, boldly learning from mistakes, and sharing the new found knowledge so others may profit. Once, weary after a long trek to Vrindavan, Swami Vivekananda was pleased to find a man by the roadside contentedly smoking a pipe. With all the ease and camaraderie of a fellow smoker, he asked the stranger for a puff from the chillum. The villager looked up at the imposing figure in ochre clothes and shrank back,

shaking his head, and proclaiming that he was a low-caste sweeper. Swamiji too instinctively pulled back. Continuing down the road he felt uneasy and disturbed. As a sannyasin Swamiji aspired to be above notions of caste and prestige, yet he fell back to old habits. Realizing this he suddenly turned around, went back to the villager, and said: 'Do prepare a Chillum of tobacco for me, my dear friend.'⁴ The mystified man agreed to share his chillum only after much persuasion. Centuries of conditioning had convinced the sweeper he was an outcaste and, therefore, was duty-bound to protect the purity of the upper castes by staying out of their way. Swamiji's forthright admission of his mistake speaks eloquently of his flexibility and dedication to creative growth.



'THE HELMSMAN', BY ARUP RANJAN CHATTERJEE - BRONZE

Another distinguishing characteristic of creative people is their ability to synthesize disparate, non-linear ideas. Swamiji has this virtue and explained the deepest truths of religion and science as if they were two sides of the same coin. He also was able to bridge traditional barriers to win the hearts of followers of many religions.

Sarfraz Hussain, one of Swamiji's disciples was a Muslim. In a letter to him Swamiji wrote:


Whether we call it Vedantism or any ism, the truth is that Advaitism is the last word of religion and thought, and the only position from which one can look upon all religions and sects with love. I believe it is the religion of the future enlightened humanity. ... I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind. ... For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedanta brain and Islam body—is the only hope.⁵

Swamiji channelled his creative energy in various ways. He was an extraordinary orator, brilliant writer, soulful singer, sensitive poet, outstanding motivator, charismatic leader of the masses, and an affectionate spiritual master. He displayed superior communication skills by completely understanding the needs and levels of the receiver before communicating so that the message would reach unmistakably. With scholars he could be scholarly and with the guileless he would be exceedingly simple.

Once addressing students in the audience after a lecture in Madras, Swamiji said: 'First of all, our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. Be strong, my young friends; ... You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of *the Gita*. ... You will understand the *Gita* better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger.'⁶ In this way

Swamiji masterfully explained the essential requirements for the study of Vedanta and developing the spirit of nationalism in a manner they could understand and implement.

Swami Vivekananda's life and teachings continue to inspire countless young men and women year after year to renounce the comforts of the modern world and take up sannyasa. He took the best elements of all monastic principles and practices, indigenous as well as non-indigenous, ancient as well as modern, and formed them into a dynamic machinery to work out national awakening in India through spirituality. This is a remarkable achievement in Indian monasticism, which is serving as a template for other organizations too—a testament to Swamiji's creative genius.

'Thus the multi-dimensional journey of Swami Vivekananda's life is a tale of stupendous human will, adventure, and lyrical beauty. There are clues here for understanding the ground we stand on today and perhaps signposts for helping one step across the minefield of contemporary strife.'⁷ 

References

1. Swami Yogeshananda, 'Paradoxical Prophet'; <<http://vedanta-atlanta.org/article-archive/essays-on-swami-vivekananda/swami-vivekananda-paradoxical-prophet>> accessed 30 October 2013.
2. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 2.496.
3. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004), 38.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 7, 1997), 7.251.
5. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.333.
6. *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.206.
7. Rajni Bakshi, 'Quest for Universal Religion'; <<http://www.indiatogether.org/opinions/rbakshi/vanand/vanand-p2.htm>> accessed 30 October 2013.

Vivekananda's New Religion: The Yoga of Virat Worship

Swami Samarpanananda

ACCORDING TO TRADITION, when Sri Ramakrishna incarnated he brought along Swami Vivekananda from the *saptarshi mandal*, abode of the seven great sages. At another time Sri Ramakrishna also said Swamiji was the ancient sage Nara, of the holy duo Nara-Narayana, and that he had come to the earth as a world teacher. Interestingly, the Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda duo is



the first in the spiritual history of the world to be independently famous for preaching spirituality. Never before had the world seen an avatara engage his disciple actively in preaching so extensively. This makes one wonder why did an avatara need extra hands to complete the task for which he himself had descended?

One answer to this question is when God incarnates, he is always accompanied by his chosen ones. A second answer is the need of the age was truly acute, and continues to be so, requiring sustained effort for a long period, at various levels, and in various settings. To accomplish this, a great sage had to come to complete the work started by an avatara himself.

There are reasons to believe this. To mention one, we find that Swamiji, after Sri Ramakrishna's *mahasamadhi*, faced years of struggle, travelling throughout the country on foot, witnessing and experiencing India's suffering before feeling ready to deliver his message to India and the world. It appears strange that Swamiji had to undergo all this even after he experienced *nirvikalpa* samadhi, and had the knowledge of the oneness of jiva and Brahman. There has to be more to him than what meets the eye.

The purpose of an avatara's advent is to help humanity realize its divine nature. But depending on the evolutionary stage of society, every avatara has to address issues differently. When an avatara arrives, he or she sets in motion a massive upheaval of a subtle creation-destruction-creation cycle, which burns the dross in the cosmic mind, nourishes new ideas, and drives both physical and mental transformation in society. In turn, the entire universe—animate and inanimate—is pushed towards a new kind of unification, harmony, and synthesis.

Hence, we can never fully fathom or quantify the contributions made by an avatara. Nor can we fix the limits of the place and time for

an avatara's influence. Here lies the difference between an ordinary teacher of spirituality and an avatara. The contribution made by the former is necessarily limited by time-space-causation, while the contributions of an avatara are far-reaching.

Swamiji was a prophet, and like every other prophet, his influence was far-reaching. Different minds could perceive the teachings and contributions of Swamiji from different perspectives, and yet, all of these interpretations could prove to be equally correct, even at times when they seem contradictory.

Although Swamiji's fundamental teaching was centred on the divine oneness of existence, the conflicts faced by humans at the time demanded that spiritual truth be explored with vigour and revealed in a fresh perspective.

He brought all these issues together and started a new kind of spiritual conflagration with the idea of Virat worship. Essentially, it means treating the world with the attitude of worship or seeing God in all aspects of the world. The word Virat means something infinitely large. When applied in the field of sadhana, it becomes the yoga of Virat worship, which is Swamiji's special contribution for this age. In Vedanta, the gross form of Brahman or the cosmic person is called Virat, the subtle aspect of the same reality is called Hiranyagarbha, and its causal aspect is Ishvara.

This message of seeing all of creation through the eyes of a worshipper had a deep impression on the respected historian Will Durant. In his monumental work *The Story of Civilization* in the volume entitled 'Our Oriental Heritage' he begins the section with a quotation from Swamiji: 'After so much austerity, I have understood this as the real truth—God is present in every Jiva; there is no other God besides that. "Who serves Jiva, serves God indeed."¹

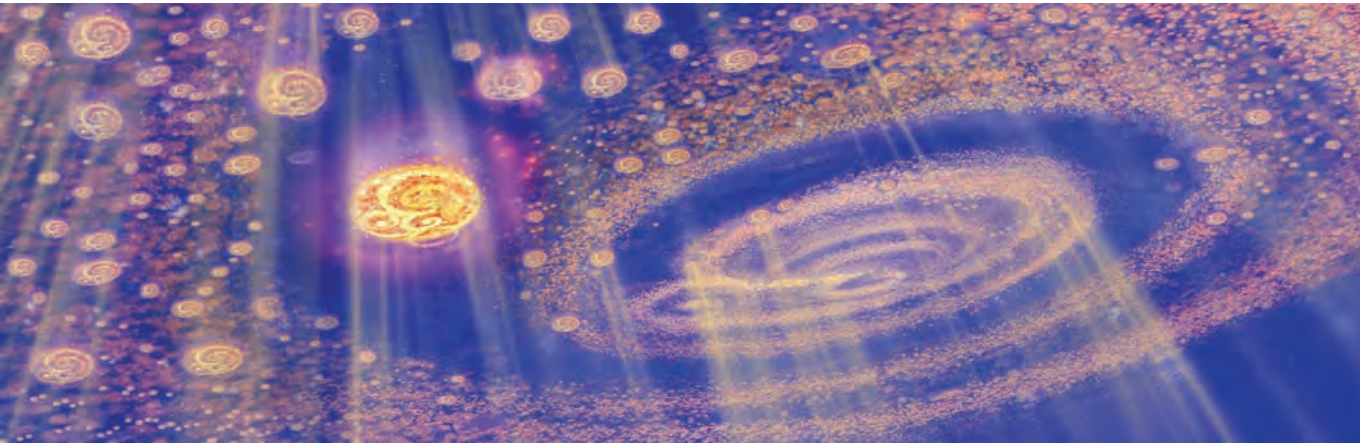
Issues that Needed Resolution

During his wanderings through the country, Swamiji had many divine visions and intuitive experiences that guided him towards his future mission and message. For example: ‘Once he had a strange vision. He saw an old man standing on the banks of the Indus, and chanting Vedic hymns, in a way distinctly different from that which is normal in modern times.’² Swamiji believed that ‘through this vision he had recovered the musical cadences of the early Aryans’ (ibid.). At Dwaraka, Gujarat, amidst the silent ruins of that great ancient city of the Yadavas, ‘he saw a great light—the resplendent Future of India’ (1.298). In Almora, on the banks of the Kosi at a place called Kakrighat he said: ‘Here under this peepul tree one of the greatest problems of my life has been solved: I have found the oneness of the macrocosm with

for India and delivering the right message to the world, started coming to him only in the US. This has been well-documented in Marie Louise Burke’s monumental work *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*.

In his travels throughout the length and breadth of India, Swamiji witnessed heartbreaking poverty juxtaposed with immense opulence, sublime spirituality as well as sheer charlatanism, illiteracy and scholarship, glory and decadence. The West exposed him to the conflicts between science and religion, rationalism and faith, worldliness and spiritual urgings, God’s will and self-reliance, exploitation and helplessness.

Swamiji needed to resolve all these conflicts and contradictions by delineating a new religion, or at least by chalking out a new spiritual outlook that could be presented as a short formula, easy to understand and practical in its application.



the microcosm. In this microcosm of the body everything that is there (in the macrocosm), exists. I have seen the whole universe within an atom’ (1.250). His plans started unfolding at Kanyakumari, where, on the last bit of rock away from the mainland, he meditated on India—her past glory, downfall, and future rise. Swamiji’s real insights into envisioning a future

Unlike a common saint, Swamiji was not to depend on divine intervention to set things right. After all, he was the divine intervention! He was now armed with the knowledge of the world, its civilizations, history, sciences, sociology, environments, economics, and particularly the mental make-up of humanity. He also had the knowledge of the ultimate spiritual



Truth with which to work out the solution. However, the solution did not come to him in a flash; it evolved gradually, much in the same way that all solutions belonging to the world of maya eventually come to everyone. He took up ideas, held on to some, discarded many, searched for and evaluated new ones till finally his message was ready—the yoga of Virat worship. He said: ‘The first of all worship is the worship of the Virat—of those all around us. ... And the first gods we have to worship are our

countrymen. These we have to worship, instead of being jealous of each other and fighting each other’ (2.208).

This yoga aimed to address the needs of the individual as well as the collective; it was meant to be as relevant for India as for the rest of the world. It was as germane and contemporary then as it is now. Yoga of Virat worship combined karma, bhakti, and jnana yogas in one practical application. Swamiji envisioned it as the universal religion of the future.

Swamiji on Virat Worship

Before Swamiji could preach his message to the world, he had to take on the issues plaguing India. After all, who would listen to the person whose own house is in shambles? So he started toying with the idea of a new kind of religion that would keep the spiritual message of the Vedas intact, but would differ in its application. He is quoted to have said in Memphis: 'I believe that the Hindoo faith has developed the spiritual in its devotees at the expense of the material, and I think that in the Western world the contrary is true. By uniting the materialism of the West with the spiritualism of the East I believe much can be accomplished.'³

Combining the two forces of spirituality and materialism was not new to India. Since time immemorial, Hinduism had preached dharma, *artha*, kama, and moksha as the four goals of human life. However, Swamiji's innovative approach to harness the synergies arising out of the pursuit of the four goals was indeed unique.

To make it clear that he wanted a new way of life for all, Swamiji wrote: 'From the very date that he was born, has sprung the Satya-Yuga (Golden Age). Henceforth there is an end to all sorts of distinctions, and everyone down to the Chandala will be a sharer in the Divine Love. The distinction between man and woman, between the rich and the poor, the literate and illiterate, Brahmins and Chandalas—he lived to root out all. And he was the harbinger of Peace—the separation between Hindus and Mohammedans, between Hindus and Christians, all are now things of the past. That fight about distinctions that there was, belonged to another era. In this Satya-Yuga the tidal wave of Shri Ramakrishna's Love has unified all.'⁴ The beginning of the Satya Yuga demanded a new religion that would be characterized by equality, compassion, and wisdom. He says: 'I believe that

the Satya Yuga (Golden Age) will come when there will be one caste, one Veda, and peace and harmony' (5.31). Swamiji's worship of the Virat offered all this.

Swamiji continued to talk about this new religion till his last day. He wrote about it, convinced others, elaborated upon it, and emphasized its importance. 'If you want any good to come, just throw your ceremonials overboard and worship the Living God, the Man-God—every being that wears a human form—God in His universal form as well as individual aspect. The universal aspect of God means this world, and worshipping it means serving it—this indeed is work, not indulging in ceremonials' (6.264). He asked his brother disciples to spread these ideas like fire and preach this worship of the Virat, a form of worship that was never undertaken in the country. In one of his stirring letters to his brother disciples he writes: 'Onward! Great Lord! ... I feel as if somebody is moving my hand to write in this way. Onward! Great Lord! Everyone will be swept away! Take care, he is coming! Whoever will be ready to serve him—no, not him but his children—the poor and the downtrodden, the sinful and the afflicted, down to the very worm—who will be ready to serve these, in them he will manifest himself' (6.295).

'Another truth I have realised is that altruistic service only is religion, the rest, such as ceremonial observances, are madness—even it is wrong to hanker after one's own salvation. Liberation is only for him who gives up everything for others, whereas others who tax their brains day and night harping on "my salvation", "my salvation", wander about with their true well-being ruined, both present and prospective; and this I have seen many a time with my own eyes' (6.395). His idea of Virat worship finally distilled into one single message for India and the world.

Unifying All Streams of Worship

There are many schools in Vedanta, but all of them can be placed upon the scales of jnana and bhakti. Pure Advaita implies giving up bhakti altogether, and pure Dvaita implies giving up jnana altogether; the remaining schools can be placed somewhere between the two. Jnana means seeing only the Atman everywhere, and *para*, higher, bhakti means seeing God everywhere. In either case, the petty self, or the ego, is left out. Therefore, pure jnana and pure bhakti is essentially one and the same: to love is to know, and to know is to love.

The twin ideas of oneness and worship, in the words of Swamiji, are the twin faces of jnana-bhakti of Vedanta. A *jnani* sees the world as having come out of himself: '*Mattah sarvam pravartate*; owing to me everything moves.'⁵ A bhakta sees the world and all that is in it as the palpable manifestation of God. Thus, it is in this yoga of Virat worship, one finds the great unification of jnana and bhakti.

Hinduism does not accept any statement as valid unless it passes the triple test of *shruti-yukti-anubhuti*, scriptures-reason-experience. This means that for a principle to be valid it must have scriptural support, it must be logical, and it must be verifiable. There is no place for sensationalism in sadhana; all through it is a disciplined search. When Swamiji talked about this path of worship, was he revealing something entirely new? If yes, then it would not be totally acceptable; and if no, then why give Swamiji the credit?

What Swamiji was talking about was not entirely new for India. A popular Vedic mantra reads: '*Tvam stri tvam pumanasi tvam kumara uta va kumari*; you are the woman, you are the man, you are the boy, and you are the girl.'⁶ The Bhagavadgita also says: '*Ekatvena prithaktvena bahudha vishvatomukham*; others worship me (God) multifariously, and other beings as the

manifold existence.'⁷ This cosmic Being 'has thousands of heads and eyes everywhere.'⁸ In the Bhagavata we read: 'So overcoming the separateness of a self-centred life, one should serve all beings with gifts, honour and love, recognizing that such service is really being rendered to me (God) who resides in all beings as their innermost Self.'⁹ There are thousands of such teachings in the Vedas and the Puranas.

Sri Ramakrishna once had a unique vision of which he spoke: 'One day I was about to gather some flowers. They were everywhere on the trees. At once I had a vision of Virat; it appeared that His worship was just over. The flowers looked like a bouquet placed on the head of the Deity. I could not pluck them.'¹⁰

There are many popular scriptural verses suggesting that every thought, word, and deed of an aspirant should be an offering to the Divine. This idea, though often quoted, is rarely seen to be practised. An overload of religion, scriptures, and sacred sayings seem to have desensitized the common religious person. One repeats what he or she has imbibed without any meaning, and without caring to practise it.

Swamiji changed it all. The significant difference between the earlier traditions and Swamiji's approach lies in its emphasis and originality of perspective. The earlier mentions of Virat were casual corollaries of the divine oneness, while in the case of Swamiji's message, it is an indisputable central reality. Also, given the condition that India was in at the time, a subjugated nation of poor and ignorant people, viewing the country as an object of worship was pertinent and effective as well as startling.

A New Religion

One major difference between Vedanta and other religions lies in the approach to the 'path' and the 'goal'. Vedanta treats the path and the goal as one



and the same, while other religions treat them as distinct entities. Thus faithful people may treat devotion as a means to an end; they may believe that it will bring them more worldly success, fame, or earn them a place in heaven after death—such individuals are not practising Vedanta. For a true Vedantin one must learn to practise what he or she wants to achieve; for the cause and the effect are same. Seeing God everywhere is both the path and the goal and it is to be attained here and now.

Swamiji preached the yoga of Virat worship as the Vedantic approach. Seeing the Divine everywhere leads to the realization of the Divine everywhere.

Why did Swamiji speak of India as the object of worship, rather than all of humanity or even the universe? The answer probably lies in his pragmatic approach to all issues he addressed. He understood that while a highly evolved Vedantin would be able to see divinity in the entire universe, an average practitioner could at least find divinity in humanity or living creatures, but for the beginner something more concrete would be necessary. The people of India were at the time caught in the eye of the storm grappling with the dichotomy of its rich history, philosophy, and heritage, juxtaposed against imperial subjugation, poverty, and ignorance. To awaken the common Indian man and woman to the divinity inherent in the nation and her people could bring direction, purpose, and a new

and keen sense of awareness to the countrymen. Swamiji understood that loving and caring for India never meant excluding others. It is rather a stepping stone to the general from the particular.

It is said that to achieve a spiritual goal, a seeker may take one of the two paths of sadhana: *iti-iti*, this-this; or *neti-neti*, not this - not this. It is interesting to note that most sadhanas are of the *neti-neti* type. This is true not just for sannyasins but involves every vow of abstinence in every religion be it chastity, austerity, frugality, or obedience. Nearly every path, including Yoga Philosophy's '*yogas-chitta-vritti-nirodhah*'; yoga is controlling the mind-stuff from taking various forms,¹¹ and the *Isha Upanishad*'s '*ma gridhah*; do not covet,' delineate the *neti-neti* approach.


The uniqueness of the yoga of Virat worship is that it combines both the mature forms of *iti-iti* and *neti-neti*. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Once I sang for Nangta [Tota Puri] at the Panchavati: "To arms! To arms, O man! Death storms your house in battle array." I sang another: "O Mother, I have no one else to blame: Alas! I sink in the well these very hands have dug." Nangta, the Vedantist, was a man of profound knowledge. The song moved him to tears though he didn't understand its meaning. Padmalochan also wept when I sang the songs of Ramprasad about the Divine Mother. And he was truly a great pundit' (357). This shows that people with profound knowledge are always endowed with love and devotion.

This age needed a new religious mould, as it were, for jnana and bhakti to combine. This mould was the worship of the Virat as a means to replace antiquated idols, deities, gods, as well as the *jnani's* dry attitude that all this is an illusion. We can assume the great *jnani* Tota Puri had to experience an aspect of this manifested Brahman to emphasize this new form of worship. While trying to cast off his body in the Ganga, as it had become a bother due to constant pain, a veil was suddenly pulled away from his mind to see the Divine Mother pervading all creation. Tota Puri waded back ashore; his knowledge perfected. This was the Vedanta preached by Swamiji. Swamiji's new religion accepts all, discards nothing, encompasses everyone, and refuses entry to no one.

Scholars use the term *upapatti* to mean derived truths or corollaries. In Vedanta, *upapatti* plays an important role to indicate the practicability of a spiritual truth. If a truth does not have practical applications, it is of no use to anyone. For example, if someone comes up with the idea of a powerful but indifferent God, sitting high up in the clouds, then it has no utility for us, and we need not pay attention to or worship such a God. The sages spoke about *upapatti* whenever possible. Thus we find the *Isha Upanishad* beginning with: '*Isha-vasyam idam sarvam yatkin-cha jagatyam jagat*'; all this, whatever moves on the earth, should be covered by the Lord.¹² The *upapatti* of this mantra is mentioned in, '*tato na vijugupsate*; feels no hatred' (6), and '*tatra ko mohah kah shokam ekatvam-anupashyatah*; what delusion and what sorrow can there be for the seer of oneness' (7).

The yoga of Virat worship is an *upapatti* of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings: 'I perceived it was God alone who had become all living beings.'¹³ This again is similar to an Upanishadic mantra: '*Sarvam khalu-idam brahma*'; all this is Brahman.'¹⁴ The corollary of this is that one must see God everywhere with a worshipper's eyes.

By specifically making India in particular and the world in general open to such a nature of the cosmos, Swamiji could touch the hearts of all people who were either religious, secular, nationalists, internationalists, unbelievers, environmentalists, learned, and the ignorant. Now there was no need to have different ideals for people of a different mindset, as long as the aspiring practitioner was willing to give up selfishness for the sake of higher things. Thus, Swamiji's ideals of service, nationalism, and practical Vedanta are nothing but different aspects of this new religion.

The beauty of Swamiji's new religion for this age, the yoga of Virat worship, lies both in its simplicity and its profundity. On the other hand, the result of this sadhana is as powerful as that declared by the highest Vedantic principles, taught for thousands of years in India. 

References

1. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), 405–6.
2. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 1.347.
3. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), 2.362.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 6.335.
5. Bhagavadgita, 10.8.
6. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 4.3.
7. Bhagavadgita, 9.15.
8. *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, 'Purusha Sukta', 1.
9. Bhagavata, 3.29.27.
10. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1996), 687–8.
11. Patanjali, *Yoga Sutra*, 1.2.
12. *Isha Upanishad*, 1.
13. *Gospel*, 357.
14. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 3.14.1.

Ramakrishna and Vivekananda: Two Teachings or One?

Arpita Mitra



THE EXISTING BODY OF LITERATURE on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition is vast and spreads across several generations. Certain aspects of this tradition have come under close and increasingly critical scrutiny by academic scholars. This essay examines one of the major points of scholarly criticism: the pervasive claim that Swami Vivekananda's teachings marked a distinctive break from those of his master, Sri Ramakrishna.

The Problematic

There are many aspects of this assertion. It is claimed that Sri Ramakrishna is more tantric than Advaitin and that his teachings could be understood, 'more adequately in the categories of tantric thought and practice than in the concepts of Shankara's *advaita*';¹ that he was a *vijnani*—an individual with special knowledge of the Absolute, in which the universe is affirmed and seen as the manifestation of Brahman—which is quite distinct from the Advaita Vedanta of Acharya Shankara; was primarily a bhakta and did not emphasize the path of jnana or karma, while Swami Vivekananda's focus had been on the latter; or that although his teachings had a basis in Advaita, 'he rarely prescribed this to his followers.'²

It is at times granted that at best Vedanta represented one of the many strands of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings but cannot be satisfactorily called his fundamental teaching. In his exposition of Advaita Vedanta, Swami Vivekananda is also considered by some to be closer to Acharya Shankara than to Sri Ramakrishna. Furthermore, some studies claim Swami Vivekananda, and the institutionalization of the movement that took place under his influence, projected the image of an Advaitin onto Sri Ramakrishna. However, one scholar, Gwilym Beckerlegge, has pointed out it is difficult to accept that: 'Vivekananda accomplished his task with either the connivance of, or a lack of effective opposition from, disciples who had been every bit as close to Ramakrishna, and who could claim to speak with authority on the basis of this intimacy.'³

To be fair there are layers of analysis and interpretation in the works of scholars and the subject is so complex that no two scholars say exactly the same thing. They may agree on some points and disagree on others. Even in two seemingly similar opinions there is usually a shade of difference. To give an illustration,

Amiya P Sen concedes Vivekananda's ideal of service is not helping others but helping oneself and this 'moral monism' is derived from his guru.⁴ However, according to Sen, while the Master and the disciple were similar in their Advaitic basics, they were different in the conclusions each derived from such a stance. Sen writes: 'Whereas the social implication of Vedantic non-dualism would indicate a strong sense of altruism and the ability to rise above rigid social classifications, none of these significantly, were pronounced in Ramakrishna.'⁵

To take another example, Walter G Neeval Jr had also acknowledged that while factors like 'Western and Christian realism and ethical concern' had a major role to play in 'the continued development and reinterpretation of this tradition', and 'if we can view Sri Ramakrishna in his own terms rather than those of Shankara's Advaita, we can accept at face value Swami Vivekananda's claim that his social concern was inspired directly by the Master.'⁶

The assertion that Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna gave two different messages to the world is based on a claim that Swamiji's projection of service as a cornerstone of the institutional programme was a radical upturning of the teachings of his Master who was supposedly sceptical of organized human endeavour of service. It has also been pointed out that Swamiji claimed karma yoga to be an independent path to liberation, without necessarily grounding itself in a belief in God, and that this is an essential difference between the guru and his foremost disciple.

In trying to locate the source of Swamiji's ideal of service, scholars have gone far and wide and tried to situate it in various factors. Arguments trace the roots of this ideal in general terms to: Vivekananda's direct exposure to Western society; various experiences and influences—both spiritual and social—during his *parivrajya*,

monastic wandering, in India; the social reality of abject poverty coupled with the immediate context of colonial critique and European orientalism; and in more specific terms, to a possible influence of the Swaminarayan movement of Western India. In brief, scholars mostly locate the source of Swamiji's ideal of service everywhere else, except in Sri Ramakrishna!

Not all of these claims are entirely wrong. There was a lot that went into the making of the swami, but no matter how big a circumference was drawn by his life and experiences, the centre point was laid down by Sri Ramakrishna. By examining the teachings of both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, this article will demonstrate Swamiji's main influence was his guru, Sri Ramakrishna.

Regarding these claims, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi resolved potential controversy once and for all in two powerful strokes. The first instance was when someone expressed doubts about Swamiji's injunction that prohibited image worship at the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, she exhorted him to always remember that the Master was undoubtedly Advaita. In another situation that took place in the hospital of the Kashi Sevashrama, she claimed she saw the Master abiding in the Sevashrama and that the boys were worshipping him wholeheartedly by serving the patients. Holy Mother had also maintained resolutely that sannyasins should engage in karma related to service, for whose work it is if not the Lord's?⁷

Scholars have approached Swamiji's alleged construction of a particular representation of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings from two points of



departure. The first is through an examination of the actual, empirical history of the development of the tradition and its institutions. The second is through an analysis of the principal teachings of the Master and the disciple. While there have been elaborate studies of the first, a close and rigorous comparison of the teachings of the Master and his foremost disciple has been rarely undertaken. Even while scholars have tried to relate the two sets of teachings, they have either concentrated on a close examination of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings alone with only broad

references to Swamiji or drawn broad conclusions on the teachings of both without closely comparing the two. This article concentrates on analysing the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda as it is the most direct method of approaching the issue.

Without going into the existing debate on the reliability of the sources for this tradition, this essay relies on two conventional sources: (i) the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by M, translated into English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*; and (ii) *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. This choice is guided by the understanding that the content of these basic sources has been only partly understood, misunderstood outside their context and the larger picture of teachings, or even misrepresented by some scholars. By relying on these sources it is possible to get a different picture compared to what has been understood by scholars so far.

Prologue: Three Attitudes of Mind

Girishchandra Ghosh reported: ‘When I wrote the play *Vilwamangal*, several of his [Sri Ramakrishna’s] disciples questioned me about it. I told them that I had learned the art of playwriting from Sri Ramakrishna. Narendra [Swami Vivekananda] has said that he learned science from Sri Ramakrishna, and Mahendra [‘M’] says Sri Ramakrishna taught him the art of teaching. How is it possible to express Sri Ramakrishna’s many moods and aspects? How can one say what they are?’⁸

Sri Ramakrishna’s own teachings reflect this point well:

You have no doubt heard the story of the chameleon. A man entered a wood and saw a chameleon on a tree. He reported to his friends, ‘I have seen a red lizard.’ He was firmly convinced that it was nothing but red. Another person, after visiting the tree, said, ‘I have seen

a green lizard.’ He was firmly convinced that it was nothing but green. But the man who lived under the tree said: ‘What both of you have said is true. But the fact is that the creature is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, and sometimes has no colour at all.’⁹

In another situation, Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘A man had a tub of dye. Such was its wonderful property that people could dye their clothes any colour they wanted by merely dipping them in it. A clever man said to the owner of the tub, “Dye my cloth the colour of your dye-stuff”’ (538). Sri Ramakrishna even summarized the issue by stating: ‘Everyone speaks of me according to his comprehension’ (593).

Sri Ramakrishna often spoke of three different attitudes of mind. There are numerous conversations that record this difference and attest the truth claim of all these apparently dissimilar positions. For example, he states:

But, my dear sir, I am in a peculiar state of mind. My mind constantly descends from the Absolute to the Relative, and again ascends from the Relative to the Absolute. ... The manifold has come from the One alone, the Relative from the Absolute. There is a state of consciousness where the many disappears, and the One, as well; for the many must exist as long as the One exists. Brahman is without comparison. ... Again, when God changes the state of my mind, when He brings my mind down to the plane of the Relative, I perceive that it is He who has become all these—the Creator, maya, the living beings, and the universe. Again, sometimes he shows me that He has created the universe and all living beings. He is the Master, and the universe His garden (307).

Sri Ramakrishna also said: ‘No one else is here, and you are my own people. Let me tell you something. I have come to the final realization that God is the Whole and I am a part of Him, that God is the Master and I am His servant.

Furthermore, I think every now and then that He is I and I am He' (572).

In another situation, he stated: 'Once Rama asked Hanuman: "How do you look on Me?" And Hanuman replied: "O Rama, as long as I have the feeling of 'I', I see that Thou art the whole and I am a part; Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant. But when, O Rama, I have the knowledge of Truth, then I realize that Thou art I, and I am Thou"' (105).

The allusion to the three different mental states of Hanuman appears repeatedly in the *Kathamrita*. In these utterances Sri Ramakrishna articulated three distinct *bhavas*, mental attitudes, all of which are equally true depending on the state of one's mind. The validity of any one does not nullify the validity of another. Despite their apparent contradictoriness they are not a forced and unsystematic synthesis of different things. They are the articulation of spiritual realizations vividly experienced by Indian mystics. Swamiji also articulated the same point as his guru:

When Prahlada forgot himself, he found neither the universe nor its cause; all was to him one Infinite, undifferentiated by name and form; but as soon as he remembered that he was Prahlada, there was the universe before him and with it the Lord of the universe ... So it was with the blessed Gopis. So long as they had lost sense of their own personal identity and individuality, they were all Krishnas, and when they began again to think of Him as the One to be worshipped, then they were Gopis again, and immediately—'Unto them appeared Krishna with a smile on His lotus face, clad in yellow robes and having garlands on, the embodied conqueror (in beauty) of the god of love.'¹⁰

It is the Man [Jesus Christ] who said, 'I and my Father are one,' whose power has descended unto millions ... we know that the same Man, because he was a non-dualist, was merciful to others. To the masses who could not conceive

of anything higher than a Personal God, he said, 'Pray to your Father in heaven.' To others who could grasp a higher idea, he said, 'I am the vine, ye are the branches,' but to his disciples to whom he revealed himself more fully, he proclaimed the highest truth, 'I and my Father are one' (2.142-3).

Jnana and Vijnana

Despite appearing contradictory, the thread running through the *Kathamrita* is that Reality is singular. Brahman and Shakti are inseparably one much like 'water and its wetness', and 'fire and its power to burn' are inseparably one.¹¹ The Absolute has become the relative, and divine Consciousness pervades everything down to the worm and the most inert matter. Now, let us examine closely an excerpt from a lecture in *Jnana Yoga* delivered by Swami Vivekananda at London in 1896, ten years after the passing away of the Master:

Here I can only lay before you what the Vedanta seeks to teach, and that is the deification of the world. The Vedanta does not in reality denounce the world. The ideal of renunciation nowhere attains such a height as in the teachings of the Vedanta. But, at the same time, dry suicidal advice is not intended; it really means deification of the world—giving up the world as we think of it, as we know it, as it appears to us—and to know what it really is. Deify it; it is God alone. We read at the commencement of one of the oldest of the Upanishads, 'Whatever exists in this universe is to be covered with the Lord.'

We have to cover everything with the Lord Himself, not by a false sort of optimism, not by blinding our eyes to the evil, but by really seeing God in everything. Thus we have to give up the world, and when the world is given up, what remains? God. What is meant? You can have your wife; it does not mean that you are to abandon her, but that you are to see God in the wife. Give up your children; what does



that mean? To turn them out of doors, as some human brutes do in every country? Certainly not. That is diabolism; it is not religion. But see God in your children. So, in everything. In life and in death, in happiness and in misery, the Lord is equally present. The whole world is full of the Lord. Open your eyes and see Him.¹²

With Sri Ramakrishna it was 'a case of negation and affirmation'.¹³ This was also the case with his foremost disciple:

We have to go through the negation, and then the positive side will begin. We have to give up ignorance and all that is false, and then truth will begin to reveal itself to us. When we have grasped the truth, things which we gave up at first will take new shape and form, will appear to us in a new light, and become deified. They will have become sublimated, and then we shall understand them in their true light. But to understand them, we have first to get a glimpse of truth; we must give them up at first, and then we get them back again, deified.¹⁴

Sri Ramakrishna illustrates the process of negation via an analogy of climbing the stairs, claiming one uses the process of '*neti, neti*; not this, not this' to leave each step behind. The process of affirmation is the realization after reaching the terrace that the terrace and the stairs are made of the same stuff. To think of the terrace and stairs as made of different material is ignorance, to know them as made of the same stuff is knowledge: 'To know many things [as many] is *ajnana*, ignorance. To know only one thing [as One] is *jnana*, Knowledge—the realization that God alone is real and that He dwells in all. And to talk to Him is *vijnana*, a fuller Knowledge. To love God in different ways, after realizing Him, is *vijnana*.'¹⁵ Thus, to explain *vijnana*, Sri Ramakrishna uses the following analogies: the stairs and the roof (604), the bel-fruit (851), the butter and butter-milk (477), the dialogue between Rama and the

sage Vashishtha (648), and the story of Kacha coming down from *nirvikalpa* samadhi (851).

Since God is everywhere, he is both 'inside and outside man' (521); inside he resides as 'our Inner Guide' (80), and outside he pervades his own creation (545). Thus Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Does God exist only when I think of Him with my eyes closed? Doesn't He exist when I look around with my eyes open?' (561). And Swamiji taught: 'The whole world is full of the Lord. Open your eyes and see Him.'¹⁶

According to Sri Ramakrishna, 'After attaining *vijnana* one can live in the world as well. Then one clearly realizes that God Himself has become the universe and all living beings, that He is not outside the world.'¹⁷ Swami Vivekananda may not have spelt out the word *vijnana*, but what he taught was really a re-statement of his Master's teachings in merely a different language. Sri Ramakrishna's definition of a *vijnani* was one who could easily commute between the 'Nitya, the Absolute' and 'Lila, the Relative' (523). Freda Matchett points out that the words Brahman and Shakti rarely appear in the public teachings of Swamiji. It is true that the words do not but the concepts do. He simply calls them by a different set of terms, the Absolute [God] and the Relative [world]. Matchett further claims that in Swamiji's teachings the 'impersonal Absolute is always supreme and there is little trace of Rāmākrishna's affirmation of the value of the individual ego and the phenomenal world.'¹⁸ The above lecture on *jnana* yoga runs counter to such a claim. In the teachings of both the Master and the pupil, the impersonal Absolute has become the phenomenal world. When existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute becomes relative, we see it as the world. So much so that Swamiji took Sri Ramakrishna's insistence on the value of the phenomenal world one step further and reached its logical conclusion in his ideal of service of a human being as God.

Moreover, according to Matchett, Sri Ramakrishna suggested that ‘apparently lower states of consciousness have a value of their own and can reflect Reality just as much as the “highest” state’ (ibid.). She contrasts it with Swamiji’s attitude, which, according to her, is that the value of lower states ‘lies entirely in furnishing a ladder to the highest state’ (ibid.).

Firstly, Sri Ramakrishna had declared unequivocally that: ‘Attainment of Chaitanya, Divine Consciousness, is not possible without the knowledge of Advaita, Non-duality.’¹⁹ Sri Ramakrishna’s emphasis on the knowledge of non-duality comes out clearly in his statement, which we find in the reminiscences of his direct disciple, Swami Turiyananda: ‘First tie the knot of non-dual knowledge in the corner of your cloth; then do as you please.’²⁰ The goal to be attained was the highest state without any compromise. It was after the attainment of this highest state that the lower states, now seen in the light of God-realization, acquired a new value.

One could come down to a lower plane or as Sri Ramakrishna described it: ‘come down again by the stairs and move about on a lower floor’ after having climbed the terrace.²¹ ‘After a man is firmly established in the ideal of “I am He”, he can live as God’s servant’ (791). But Sri Ramakrishna always insisted on the absolute necessity of climbing up the terrace: ‘The important thing is for a man somehow to climb to the roof’ (604). The realization that the roof and the stairs are made up of the same stuff cannot be pre-empted on the basis of hearsay, without climbing up to the terrace. One has to first climb and only then arrive at first-hand knowledge of the oneness of the material out of which the stairs and the terrace are made.

Sri Ramakrishna reported that once Keshab Sen, Pratap Mazumdar and others said to him: ‘Sir, we follow the ideal of King Janaka’ (626). Sri

Ramakrishna replied: ‘Mere words don’t make a King Janaka. How many austerities King Janaka first had to perform in solitude—standing on his head, and so on! Do something first; then you may become a King Janaka’ (626). He also said elsewhere: ‘One cannot be a King Janaka all of a sudden. Janaka at first practised much austerity in solitude’ (139).

Secondly, while on the one hand, after attaining the ‘highest’ stage, the ‘lower’ stages acquire a different value. On the other hand, ‘lower’ stages are also a step in attaining the ‘highest’ stage. The steps are as important as the means despite not being an end in themselves. This point is aptly illustrated by the conversation that took place between Sri Ramakrishna and Pratap Chandra Hazra, where the Master said that the ‘aim of spiritual discipline, of chanting God’s name and glories, is to realize just that’ that the ‘devotee really prays to his own Self’, that God ‘is both inside and outside’, and that God has become everything; but one ‘needs the clay mould as long as the gold image has not been cast; but when the image is made, the mould is thrown away’ (521). On another occasion when Hazra criticized Narendra’s offering of sweets to God and singing of devotional songs, saying that God was Infinity to whom all these did not matter, Sri Ramakrishna observed that this made Narendra ‘sink ten fathoms’ and he reprimanded Hazra and said, ‘How can a man live if he gives up devotion? No doubt God has infinite splendour; yet He is under the control of His devotees’ (792).

Jnana and Bhakti

Matchett concluded that Vivekananda was closer to Acharya Shankara than his own Master. However, she does not provide any close comparative textual evidence in support of her argument. She concludes: ‘As in Śāṅkarā *bhakti* belongs to a lower stage of spiritual development

than *jnanā* since “the Personal God and all that exists in the universe are the same Impersonal Being seen through our minds.”²² First of all, Sri Ramakrishna maintained the personal God is but a manifestation of the Impersonal Being, that Satchidananda was like an infinite ocean and the various forms of God were really the freezing of the water of this ocean into ice under the cooling effect of bhakti (191). Secondly, in the above quotation from Swamiji that Matchett cites, there is really no suggestion of subordinating bhakti to jnana. Claiming that a personal God is a particular manifestation of the impersonal Being does not logically establish that the swami is trying to put bhakti on a lower footing than jnana. One may also consider the following extract from the *Complete Works*. There is no suggestion of superiority or inferiority, only a plain statement of facts:

Brahman is as the clay or substance out of which an infinite variety of articles are fashioned. As clay, they are all one; but form or manifestation differentiates them. Before every one of them was made, they all existed potentially in the clay, and, of course, they are identical substantially; but when formed, and so long as the form remains, they are separate and different; the clay-mouse can never become a clay-elephant, because, as manifestations, form alone makes them what they are, though as unformed clay they are all one. Ishvara is the highest manifestation of the Absolute Reality, or in other words, the highest possible reading of the Absolute by the human mind.²³

What was Sri Ramakrishna’s freezing of water to take the form

of ice, is his disciple’s clay elephant. On the other hand, according to Swamiji: ‘There is not really so much difference between knowledge (Jnana) and love (Bhakti) as people sometimes imagine. We shall see, as we go on, that in the end they converge and meet and end at the same point’ (3.32). Elsewhere, he says:

The Jnanis hold Bhakti to be an instrument of liberation, the Bhaktas look upon it both as the instrument and the thing to be attained. To my mind this is a distinction without much difference. In fact, Bhakti, when used as an instrument, really means a lower form of worship, and the higher form becomes inseparable from the lower form of realisation at a later stage. Each seems to lay a great stress upon his own peculiar method of worship, forgetting that with perfect love true knowledge is bound to come even unsought, and that from perfect knowledge true love is inseparable (3.34).



Swamiji's analogy of jnana and bhakti as two wings certainly does not indicate that he held bhakti to be of less consequence than jnana, as two wings in a bird must always be equal. He was definitely not in concurrence with the view that bhakti had no value beyond being an instrument.

Swamiji distinguished between two stages of bhakti: *gauni*, preparatory, dwelling mostly on rules and rituals, where love is an instrument to reach God; and *para*, supreme, where the devotee experiences extreme love for God. In such a state one verily sees God everywhere and reaches a stage where 'love, lover, and beloved become one' (6.77). The purpose of the first stage of bhakti is to lead to the second and 'the highest expression of love is unification' (7.30). Swamiji verily equated the higher form of jnana with the higher form of bhakti: 'Extreme love and highest knowledge are one' (7.9). Sri Ramakrishna had made exactly the same distinction between two stages of bhakti: *vaidhi* bhakti, dwelling on rules and rituals, and *prema* bhakti or *raga* bhakti, intense love for God. The names the Master and the disciple used were different, but the essence of the definitions was the same. The former is comprised of ceremonies, and in ordinary souls, its practice over a long time leads to the latter. Whereas, the latter is characterized by extreme love and longing for God. Sri Ramakrishna insisted God is unattainable without *raga* bhakti.²⁴

Like his master, Swamiji believed that the 'one great advantage of Bhakti is that it is the easiest and the most natural way to reach the divine end in view.'²⁵ The sheer naturalness of the path of bhakti makes all worldly desires fall off as the dry scales of a snake. As Swamiji states: 'Love concentrates all the power of the will without effort' (7.44). Furthermore, 'Bhakti is not destructive; it teaches that all our faculties may become means to reach salvation. We must turn them all towards God and give to Him that love

which is usually wasted on the fleeting objects of sense' (7.83). This clearly reminds us of Sri Ramakrishna's advice to divert our desires and passions towards God, thereby sublimating them. The swami was also aware of the difficulty of jnana yoga for the lay person:

Talk of reason! Very few people reason, indeed. You hear a man say, 'Oh, I don't like to believe in anything; I don't like to grope through darkness. I must reason.' And so he reasons. But when reason smashes to pieces things that he hugs unto his breast, he says, 'No more! This reasoning is all right until it breaks my ideals. Stop there!' That man would never be a Jnani. That man will carry his bondage all his life and his lives to come. Again and again he will come under the power of death. Such men are not made for Jnana. There are other methods for them—such as Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, or Raja Yoga—but not Jnana Yoga (9.215).

Scholars tend to characterize Swamiji as a *jnani* perhaps on account of his emphasis on Advaita Vedanta. They seem to consider his preaching of Advaita as preaching the jnana *marga*, path of knowledge and discernment. But Advaita cannot be explained in terms of jnana alone. Its essence is the divinity of humans, which Sri Ramakrishna also taught when he repeatedly declared that God has verily become everything, a precept better known in the Ramakrishna literature as *vijnana*. Advaita Vedanta is the basic underlying principle because, as Swamiji states: 'This philosophy preaches a God who is a sum total. If you seek a universal religion which can apply to everyone, that religion must not be composed of only the parts, but it must always be their sum total and include all degrees of religious development. This idea is not clearly found in any other religious system' (2.141). Especially in the context of the West, Swamiji knew that their salvation depended on

a 'rationalistic religion' (2.139), but by 'rationalistic religion,' the jnana *marga* alone is not meant. It means a religion whose premises and precepts can be explained rationally and logically with evidence. For example, it can explain rationally why we should not hurt our neighbour because our neighbour is our own self in just another form. Swamiji explained:

Though all religions have taught ethical precepts, such as, 'Do not kill, do not injure; love your neighbour as yourself,' etc., yet none of these has given the reason. Why should I not injure my neighbour? To this question there was no satisfactory or conclusive answer forthcoming, until it was evolved by the metaphysical speculations of the Hindus who could not rest satisfied with mere dogmas. So the Hindus say that this Atman is absolute and all-pervading, therefore infinite. There cannot be two infinities, for they would limit each other and would become finite. Also each individual soul is a part and parcel of that Universal Soul, which is infinite. Therefore in injuring his neighbour, the individual actually injures himself. This is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes (1.384–5).

Not just jnana yoga, but all the four yogas are premised on this reason. Advaita is not the antithesis of bhakti. A personal God is perfectly explicable within the framework of Advaita as 'the highest possible reading of the Absolute by the human mind' (3.37). Again, after bhaktas realize God, they know God dwells inside all, including oneself. As Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Most advanced devotees say that He Himself has become all this—the twenty-four cosmic principles, the universe, and all living beings.'²⁶ The Holy Mother explained: 'When one attains true knowledge, God Himself ceases to exist separately. One calls upon the eternal Mother and in the end finds Her in all creation. Everything then becomes One. That is all.'²⁷ Sri Ramakrishna

gave the example of Prahlada, the quintessential bhakta, to illustrate the Advaitic point that Hari dwells in all. He explained:

There are three kinds of devotees: superior, mediocre, and inferior. The inferior devotee says, 'God is out there.' According to him God is different from His creation. The mediocre devotee says: 'God is the Antaryami, the Inner Guide. God dwells in everyone's heart.' The mediocre devotee sees God in the heart. But the superior devotee sees that God alone has become everything; He alone has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. He finds that everything, above and below, is filled with God. Read the Gita, the Bhagavata, and the Vedanta, and you will understand all this. Is not God in His creation?²⁸

It is worthwhile to note that he cites the Bhagavadgita, the Bhagavata, and Vedanta as stating the same truth of God being ever-present in creation. Sri Ramakrishna used to cite from the Bhagavata, the crest-jewel text of the path of devotion, the fourfold outward signs of a person who has had the vision of God. One 'behaves sometimes like a child, sometimes like a ghoul, sometimes like an inert thing, and sometimes like a madman' (451). Incidentally, Acharya Shankara's *Vivekachudamani* lists similar outward signs of a knower of the Atman: 'He wanders in the world, sometimes like a madman, sometimes like a child and at other times like a ghoul.'²⁹

On the other hand, *vijnana* is not bhakti alone. Sri Ramakrishna defined a *vijnani* as having both 'ripe knowledge and devotion.'³⁰ One of his favourite scriptures was the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, from which he was very fond of quoting and that he considered a fusion of jnana and bhakti.

Some scholars have approached this issue from a different perspective, distorting evidence and putting forth flimsy arguments based on



superficial understanding. N P Sil has misconstrued Swamiji's apparent reservations about the dissemination of the Radha-Krishna ideal as his sharp divergence from his guru. Swamiji's statement in the concerned letter written to Swami Ramakrishnananda and cited by Sil was in the context of a particular devotee, Biligiri Iyengar, a worshipper of Rama. The full citation is: 'There is not the least necessity for teaching the divine Love of Radha and Krishna. Teach them pure devotion to Sita-Ram and Hara-Parvati. See that no mistake is made in this respect. Remember that the episodes of the divine relationship between Radha and Krishna are quite unsuitable

for young minds. Specially Biligiri and other followers of Ramanujacharya are worshippers of Rama; so see to it that their innate attitude of pure devotion is never disturbed.'³¹

Sil has erased the context of Rama worship and of Biligiri Iyengar and in support of his argument has only cited: 'Remember that the episodes of the divine relationship between Radha and Krishna are quite unsuitable for young minds'. Sil omitted Swamiji's emphasis on preserving a devotee's innate devotion towards his Ishta Devata, Chosen Ideal, and distorted his qualifications about the difficulty of grasping the meaning of the divine love of Radha and

Krishna. Sil quoted Swamiji out of context to claim that he was preaching ‘against Radha-Krishna worship—something that would have sorely troubled his master.’³²

Contrary to such assertions, the truth is that it is generally believed one of young Narendranath’s first vision of God with form was of Sri Radha. Sri Ramakrishna mentioned that Narendranath respected Radha: ‘He says that if anyone wants to know how to love Satchidananda, he can learn it from her.’³³ His brother disciples testify that Swamiji used to say: ‘Radha was a froth in the Ocean of Love. She was not of flesh and blood.’³⁴ On the other hand, Swami Brahmananda explained the reason behind Swamiji’s reservations regarding a free preaching of the Radha-Krishna ideal:

Swamiji has said, ‘A little awakening of the Kundalini is dangerous.’ Unless the Kundalini rises to the higher planes, lust, anger, and other low passions become very powerful. That is why the Vaishnava practices as a lover or friend are dangerous. Constantly dwelling on the love-relations between Shri Krishna and Shri Radha, they cannot control their lust and are degraded. I know of one who practised this way for a long time, but afterwards married a bad woman. One, therefore, should not in the beginning study books on Shri Krishna’s love-relations with the Gopis.³⁵

Therefore, the distinction identified by scholars between Sri Ramakrishna’s bhakti and Swami Vivekananda’s jnana is superficial. Bhakti and jnana are not mutually exclusive opposites. How is it possible to love God without knowing that God alone is real? Sri Ramakrishna pointed this out: ‘How can you *love* someone unless you *know* him?’³⁶ True bhakti is premised in jnana. This stance has been repeatedly maintained, as Swamiji stated: ‘Existence without knowledge and love cannot be; knowledge without love and

love without knowledge cannot be.’³⁷ Swamiji also said: ‘Real existence, real knowledge, and real love are eternally connected with one another, the three in one: where one of them is, the others also must be; they are the three aspects of the One without a second—the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss’ (1.58).

Sri Ramakrishna trained his householder and future monastic disciples according to his innate temperament and stage of development. That is the reason why his different teachings appear contradictory at times. But the basis of all his teachings was that God pervades his own creation down to inert matter. As for Swamiji, his lectures were mainly public but even therein he gave broad options to everybody to choose from, depending on their temperament and aptitudes, while keeping Advaita as the basis. In his personal life Swamiji had a curious quality, which had been observed by several people close to him. One testimony is that of Josephine MacLeod who notes in her reminiscences: ‘He had a curious quality that when he was a *bhakta*, a lover, he brushed aside *karma* and *raja* and *jnana yogas* as if they were of no consequence whatever. And when he was a *karma-yogi*, then he made that the great theme. Or equally so, the *jnana*. Sometimes, weeks, he would fall in one particular mood utterly disregarding of what he had been, just previous to that.’³⁸ One should note that similar observations have been made about Sri Ramakrishna as well. Swami Brahmananda has noted: ‘When he talked about knowledge [jnana], he did not talk about anything else. Again, when he talked about devotion [bhakti], he spoke of nothing but devotion.’³⁹

We get a clue to the real meaning of such changeable attitudes of mind in an observation by Sister Nivedita. In reference to a certain incident she said: ‘Swami is all against *bhakti* and emotion now—determined to banish it, he says.

But how tremendous is that unity of mind and heart, from which he starts. He can afford to dispense with either—since both are fully developed.’⁴⁰ Swamiji was the embodiment of the perfect harmonious development of human personality, the perfect joining of the ‘hand, head and heart’ on which he harped all the time. Swami Saradananda recorded: ‘It was characteristic of Naren that though jnana was so strong in him and he was so manly in every respect, still he was very gentle and full of devotion. Sri Ramakrishna often remarked on this, and once he said, looking at Naren’s face: “Could one who is only a dry jnani have such eyes? You have, along with jnana, all the tender feelings of the devotee. You have the strength of a man and the devotion of a woman.”’⁴¹

(To be continued)

References

1. Walter G Neeval Jr, ‘The Transformation of Sri Ramakrishna’ in *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions*, ed. Bardwell L Smith (Leiden: E J Brill, 1976), 76.
2. Amiya P Sen, *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal 1872-1905: Some Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi: Oxford University, 1993), 298.
3. Gwilym Beckerlegge, *Swami Vivekananda’s Legacy of Service* (New Delhi: Oxford University, 2006), 6.
4. See Amiya P Sen, *Explorations in Modern Bengal c.1800-1900: Essays on Religion, History and Culture* (Delhi: Primus, 2010), 104.
5. *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal 1872-1905: Some Essays in Interpretation*, 317.
6. *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions*, 56.
7. Dushyanta Pandya, *The Universal Mother* (Delhi: Roadworthy, 2008), 140.
8. Swami Chetanananda, *Girish Chandra Ghosh: A Bohemian Devotee of Sri Ramakrishna* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2009), 27.
9. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 559.
10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997) 3.40-1.
11. *Gospel*, 287.
12. *Complete Works*, 2.145-53.
13. *Gospel*, 562.
14. *Complete Works*, 2.167.
15. *Gospel*, 598-9.
16. *Complete Works*, 2.146.
17. *Gospel*, 418.
18. Freda Matchett, ‘The Teachings of Ramakrishna in Relation to the Hindu Tradition and as Interpreted by Vivekânanda’, *Religion*, 11/2 (April 1981), 177.
19. *Gospel*, 308.
20. Swami Chetanananda, *Ramakrishna As We Saw Him* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 210.
21. *Gospel*, 562.
22. ‘The Teachings of Ramakrishna in Relation to the Hindu Tradition and as Interpreted by Vivekânanda’, 178.
23. *Complete Works*, 3.37.
24. *Gospel*, 172-3, 196, 588.
25. *Complete Works*, 3.32.
26. *Gospel*, 133.
27. *In the Company of the Holy Mother* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 51.
28. *Gospel*, 909-10.
29. Acharya Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978), 540.
30. *Gospel*, 523.
31. *Complete Works*, 8.398.
32. Narasingha P Sil, ‘Vivekânanda’s Rāmākṣṇa: An Untold Story of Mythmaking and Propaganda’, *Numen*, 40/1 (January 1993), 38.
33. *Gospel*, 786.
34. *Smritir Aloye Swamiji*, ed. Swami Purnatmananda (Kolkata: Udbodhan Karyalaya, 2001), 17.
35. *Spiritual Talks by the First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 37-8.
36. *Gospel*, 718.
37. *Complete Works*, 2.143.
38. *His Eastern and Western Admirers, Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004), 234.
39. *Ramakrishna As We Saw Him*, 77.
40. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, 289.
41. *Ramakrishna As We Saw Him*, 185.

Vivekananda's Message for Modern Times

Pravrajika Vrajaprana

BEFORE I LAUNCH into any discussion on Swami Vivekananda, we should consider whether or not he *has* a message for us. We may well think that he doesn't. After all, he passed away 111 years ago and the world today is nothing like the world a century ago. Secondly, although nearly four years of his life were devoted to the US and Americans, most of Vivekananda's life was spent in India and much of his energy was devoted to regenerating India. And above all, Vivekananda was a monk: how relevant can a monk's message be to anyone in today's secular world? So if Vivekananda has a message, is it even relevant to those of us living in America today?



Relevance of His Message

My answer is yes, obviously. Why is his message relevant? For, unlike all the other people who died over a century ago, Vivekananda was a prophet. He was a seer, a rishi, and he spoke for the ages. He knew very well what was coming in the future; he saw it as clearly as we can see our hands in front of us. He said he would not live to see forty. He knew that India would become politically free, and in 1897 he exhorted Indians: 'For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote—this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds.'¹ And, fifty years later, in 1947, India became free. 'In connection with China, the Swami once said at a later time, "I see before me the body of an elephant. There is a foal within. But it is a lion-cub that comes out of it. It will grow in future, and China shall become great and powerful"' (2.559). He saw the first rise of socialism in Russia and China. About Europe he said: 'The whole of Western civilization will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years if there is no spiritual foundation' (2.182). With two World Wars falling within the fifty years of which he spoke, who will say that his words were wide off the mark! He also predicted the rise of the masses and said that they will gain supremacy in society. All of these came to pass and none of these events could have been foreseen—in fact, they seemed laughable at the time.

Interestingly, in the July-August 2013 issue of *Intelligent Life*, which is the culture and technology spinoff of *The Economist*, six eminent writers were asked: 'What was the greatest speech ever?' Mark Tully, one of the six, who was the BBC's former bureau chief for India, chose Swami Vivekananda's speech at the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago. The other winners were Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address, Nelson Mandela's speech at his trial in South Africa, and Hillary Clinton's address on women's rights in Beijing.²

What is amazing is that Vivekananda's speech was given on 9/11—September 11—exactly 108 years before those planes, commandeered by terrorists, tore into New York's Twin Towers. One hundred and eight years gets our attention because we all know that 108 is a significant number. On 11 September 1893, 108 years before 9/11, Vivekananda said: 'Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. ... I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.'³

If only we had listened to his message then and taken it seriously, how much pain the world would have been spared! I hope by now I've convinced you that Vivekananda's vision was unerring, and that his message bears immense weight on our world today. I would therefore suggest that we tune ourselves to Vivekananda's frequency so that we can listen to what he has to say to us right now. Vivekananda's spirit is as alive today as it was when he sat as a boy at the feet of his guru Sri Ramakrishna. Not long before Vivekananda passed, he said: 'It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body—to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God' (5.414).

This is the message Vivekananda has given us and this is his message for today, tomorrow, and for all the ages to come: to know that we are one with God. This truth—the truth of our oneness with divinity—is his message and it is the basis of all his teachings; it is the basis of Vedanta. What, then, are we supposed to *do* with this message? How is this at all relevant to anyone's life in today's secular world? What does it mean for us in practical terms?

Obviously Vivekananda wasn't expecting everyone to renounce the world, to find some nice cozy cave so that we can all meditate in solitude. Vivekananda wanted *all* of humanity to know its oneness with God. Not just monks and nuns, not just people associated with the Ramakrishna Movement and not just Hindus. He said 'until the *world* shall know that it is one with God.' That's a pretty tall order, so let's step back a little and take a deeper look.

One thing we know about Vivekananda was that, while he was a visionary, he was also intensely practical. Therefore, if his message is for humanity to know it is one with God, we also know that he had practical means for doing so, and that these means would be available for all people at all times. Swami Vivekananda was highly critical of philosophy without accompanying action, and he was especially critical of any philosophy that was without heart. In speaking of Vedanta philosophy in India, he said that its 'one defect' was that it worked 'on the spiritual plane only, and nowhere else; now the time has come when you have to make it practical' (3.427).

What Vivekananda said to some distinguished visitors from Punjab gives us an idea of just how practical and down to earth Vivekananda was. He said: 'So long as even a dog of my country remains without food, to feed and take care of him is my religion, and anything else is either non-religion or false religion!'¹⁴ This is fairly surprising news for those who sweetly assumed that Hinduism meant meditating until one was floating in bliss, at which time you transcended the world and became an illumined yogi. Vivekananda would have none of it. He said: 'After so much Tapasya I have understood this as the highest truth: "God is present in every being. There is no other God besides that. He who serves all beings serves God indeed!"' (2.618).

Our Real Nature

So much for floating in bliss! We are not to turn our backs on the world, but to turn our backs on our own worldliness. We are to divinize the world and its living beings and see it for what it really is—a manifestation of the Divine. Vivekananda famously said: 'Do not seek for Him, just see Him!'¹⁵ Brahman, the infinite divine Reality, pervades this universe and the highest manifestation of divinity lies within the human heart. Our divine nature is the greatest truth of our lives; we *are* that infinite divine Reality—free, pure, perfect, and eternal.

The obvious corollary to this—which we, alas, often forget because it is so inconvenient—is that every *other* being's real nature is also divine, pure, perfect, and eternal. I may be able to believe this about myself—I may be able to persuade myself that my real nature is divine, free, and perfect—but what about that person I don't like? That is always the rub.

But Vivekananda doesn't allow us to escape; we don't get a pass on this. In affirming our oneness with the infinite divine Brahman we also affirm, as Vivekananda said: 'Feel for them as your Veda teaches you, till you find they are parts of your own bodies, till you realise that you and they, the poor and the rich, the saint and the sinner, are all part of the One Infinite Whole, which you call Brahman' (3.432). That means even the person I don't like is a manifestation of Brahman, the infinite divine Reality. It means even those people that are Republicans or Democrats, even those that are black, white, brown, Muslim, or Christian—and we can all fill in our own blanks here—even those that we choose to see as somehow radically 'other' than me, they too are all manifestations of the same infinite, divine Brahman.

The Divine resides in the hearts of *all beings*. No exceptions. Even those we choose to re-vile, hate, dismiss as not worthy of our care or

attention—including the homeless, drug addicts, racists, and bigots. The Divine resides in the hearts of those that have hurt, betrayed, or used us. Vivekananda will not allow us to exclude from divinity those that we would prefer to dismiss. We cannot dismiss anyone or anything because if we deny the divinity of those we don't care for, we deny *everyone else's* divinity, including our own. Vivekananda's radical vision, a vision he shared with the ancient Vedic sages, encompasses all beings. And, truth be told, until

we absorb his message and try to expand our own hearts, we will never find joy or peace or real satisfaction in this world.

How do we *see* God, then, instead of seeking him—or ignoring him, as the case may be? This is the practical application that we need to address. We will *see* God when we see the world without our own worldliness. And the root of our worldliness is our own selfishness and self-centredness. Our worldliness has its source in the big ugly ego that always gets in our way, only we usually don't

'UNTITLED', BY SEKHAR ROY - MIXED MEDIA



see it that way because we usually find our own ego so charming and comfortable. When we are aware of our unity with the Divine and see that all beings are suffused with that same Divinity, *then* we see accurately. When we see ourselves as separate from others, that's when we know that selfishness has crept in and has blinded our vision. When this happens, our life becomes sour; then greed, jealousy, lust, hatred, and every other mean-spirited emotion manifests itself and makes life miserable for us and for everybody else. We forget the real nobility of our nature.

This is why Vivekananda preached unselfishness above all else. Unselfishness is *the* key quality for us and for all people to develop. Unselfishness is the practical application of Vivekananda's philosophy and it is applicable to all people everywhere, in every land and in every culture and at every socio-economic level. Unselfishness can be our key practice, no matter whether we live in the world or in a monastery or convent; no matter whether we're Indian, American, old, young, black, white, brown, rich, poor, female, or male. In the big picture, none of these distinctions matter. What *does* matter is, as Vivekananda said: 'Are you unselfish? That is the question. If you are, you will be perfect without reading a single religious book, without going into a single church or temple' (1.93).

We may well ask, how does *that* work? It seems like an oversimplification. It is easy to think of Vivekananda's words as an overstatement, but if we unpack it and see it for what it is, we'll see that the whole of spiritual life, indeed the whole of life itself, is present in these deceptively simple words.

Let us first think about the word unselfish. We bandy about the words 'selfish' and 'unselfish' without much thought, but what exactly is that 'self' at the root of both words? Knowing this is the key to our understanding, because it is our wrong idea of self that causes us all our difficulties

in the first place. The wrong idea of self makes us feel that we are separate from everything else—from other people, other beings and from everything else in the world. It is really no exaggeration to say that our own wrong idea of what is our self is what gives us every misery we've ever had.

Knowing the Self

In Sanskrit, the word for 'Self' is 'Atman'. Usually when we think of the Atman, we think of the eternal, divine presence that dwells in the heart. And that is, of course, correct. But actually the word 'Atman' merely means 'Self', so the word 'Atman' can mean 'body' or 'mind' or 'the eternal indwelling Spirit', depending upon the context in which it is used. For example, in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*,⁶ there is a discussion of the five ways in which people self-identify, and so there is a discussion of the five Atmans—which to an ear untrained in Vedanta, sounds very strange indeed!

How we *think* of what constitutes my 'self' defines the terminology. We first encounter the body, the *annamaya-atma*, food self, or gross matter self. At the beginning of our investigation into the self, we take this outer body, to be the real 'me'. This is where our identification of me begins and ends. But as our investigation continues, we realize that there is something deeper than the physical body; there is something within us that is more permanent, and therefore more real, than the outer physical body. When someone dies, we see that the body—which had earlier been filled with life and energy, thought and feeling—has become dead matter. That's when we realize that the physical body is a sheath, a covering over the *pranamaya-atma* that moves throughout the body. We realize that the *prana* is the real enlivening force. At this point we identify the *pranamaya-atma* as the real self or the real me. When we come to this conclusion, our definition of self changes: the body, which we at first thought was

the *real* me then becomes a sheath—a covering over what we now know is more real.

As we go further in our investigation, we realize that even deeper and more real than the *prana* self is the *manomaya-atma*, mind self. This process of identifying what is the real self or the real me continues until, as our search becomes even deeper, even beyond the *vijnanamaya-atma*, intelligence self, and *anandamaya-atma*, bliss self, we at last encounter the luminous, pure, and eternal core of our being—that from which ‘the mind and words turn away’ (2.4.1), the absolute Reality, which is the nature of absolute bliss, pure consciousness and pure being. Then we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that *this*, and this alone is the real ‘me’, and everything else is a covering over that. Sri Ramakrishna told a story that illustrates this: ‘The king lives beyond seven gates. At each gate sits a man endowed with great power and glory. At each gate the visitor asks, “Is this the king?” The gate-keeper answers, “No. Not this, not this.” The visitor passes through the seventh gate and becomes overpowered with joy. He is speechless. This time he doesn’t have to ask, “Is this the king?” The mere sight of him removes all doubts.’⁷

And so it shall be for us also.

But until we reach this point, however, where we personally encounter the grandeur of the king, the divine Self within us, we go through various identifications of what we think is the real me and who and what is my real self. And this is where we come back to the nature of selfishness and unselfishness. It is our wrong identification with who is the real me and what is my self that leads us to selfishness. The good news is that because we *are* the Divine, our natural instinct is to be unselfish. Selfishness is actually an aberration, it is not who we really are. Selfishness is like a spiritual flu: it shows us something systemic is out of sync. Selfishness is

a symptom of wrong identification, of not knowing who we really are. Unselfishness, on the other hand, is a sign that the real divine Self is shining through whatever ignorance we may have.

We need to remember, however, that unselfishness is not to be confused with being a doormat or jellyfish or being an enabler. There is a world of difference between a doormat and a person who aspires to love and serve other beings as a manifestation of divinity. Being unselfish does not mean being a martyr. Being unselfish does not mean allowing other people to walk over us, nor does unselfishness mean allowing others to take advantage of us. Being unselfish does not mean allowing people to misuse their power, nor does unselfishness mean that we allow people to forget their good manners.

Just as there is a great difference between genuine humility and one who lacks self-respect, so also there’s a great difference between being unselfish and being a willing victim. A person who willingly allows oneself to be treated badly has a distorted sense of self—just as one who is egotistic and pretentious has a distorted sense of self. Both manifestations have their root in the same ignorance—they are taking the false, limited self, and mistaking it for the true divine Self. The true Self, the Atman, doesn’t need propping up with petty manifestations of power and control. When we see our real Self, when we *know* that we are infinite, unlimited, and free, when we realize that joy is our very nature, then no one and nothing can have power over us. This is where our self-respect must be located, in knowing our real Self.

Therefore we need to always guard against thinking of ourselves as weak, limited, helpless, or worthless, because when we do so, we are doing a terrible injustice to ourselves. If we think of ourselves as weak and limited, we will act accordingly and the damage goes deeper. Further, if we think of ourselves as weak, limited,

and worthless, we will treat others in the same way, given the opportunity.

Making Knowledge Practical

True unselfishness means that we see the divine Self in all beings and all beings in the Self and we act according to that vision. When we are self-ish, we are the centre of our universe and everyone and everything revolves around us. We are the heroes of our stories; we are the masters of our narrative. It is embarrassing but true, and it's all too human. All this happens when we think that my 'self' is the body-mind complex and that I am limited to that entity. When I think I am a limited being, unconnected to everything around me, I become subject to fear and want. When I think that I am limited and weak, I will do everything I can to prop up this false me by pushing others out of the way so that I can come first. I will acquire things that I don't need so that I can be bigger than the frail person I fear myself to be. When I identify myself with what is small and limited, I put myself at the mercy of others' whims and I lose my freedom. Then I resent others for their power over me.

But that resentment is misplaced: *I have given away my birthright of freedom, joy, and fearlessness by my own misplaced identification. When we know, as Vivekananda tells us, 'that we are in essence one with God'*⁸—what fear, what hatred, what pettiness and misery can affect us? What or who can I be jealous of? How can we feel resentment towards manifestations of the Divine? One who is a manifestation of my own Self? We can't. We can only respond with love and service. Christ said: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.' Vivekananda added to that: 'Love them as ourselves, in fact to see ourselves in them' (6.107). How, then, can we hate or be jealous of our own Self?

This oneness of life is the greatest truth of the Hindu tradition: we are united in and through

divinity with all beings. The natural outcome of knowing our divine nature is unselfishness, and the natural outcome of unselfishness is for the ego to take a step back while our real divine nature shines forth. As Vivekananda said: 'Unselfishness is God.' That is about as clear-cut a directive as we can get.

Vivekananda taught that the practical application of Vedanta that was missing in the past was service to humanity, in fact service to all beings—let's not forget the dog that Vivekananda mentioned to those gentlemen from Punjab—knowing that in doing so we are worshipping the manifold forms of the Divine standing before us. Vivekananda said: 'See the Lord back of every being and give to Him' (7.68). Serving all beings is the same as serving God.

It is important to remember, though, that service doesn't mean only feeding the poor and nursing the sick. No grand acts of going to Africa or Haiti or the barrios of San Francisco are necessary. Though these acts are commendable, they're not easily replicable in our own individual situations. Nor should they be: all of us have our own dharma, our own life's duties to fulfil. We can do our duties and expand our hearts through service at the same time; in doing so, we will be living a life of true spirituality.

Real service can be found in simple, often unnoticed, unselfish actions. To sit and listen to someone patiently is service. To make breakfast for our family is service. To call a friend in need is service; to pray for the distressed is also great service. All these actions can be done self-ishly—that is, with an expectation of gratitude or appreciation. But we must remember that if we do acts of service and *still* expect gratitude or appreciation, we will then sabotage our own happiness and our spiritual life. Our expectations of any reward or gratitude will become our own self-imposed torture scheme.

What, after all, do we expect? What do we really want? We want acknowledgment, gratitude, appreciation, and we want people to know that we're here. We don't want to be invisible. But if we really analyse this, what is this really about? Aren't we really saying that we feel incomplete? That we are not whole?

We only desire what we think we don't have, but the truth is, we lack nothing. Because we've formed a habit of looking outside of ourselves for happiness and fulfilment, we've neglected the truth that fulfilment and joy are already inside us. We *are* joy and perfection itself. Because we're habituated to looking outside for happiness, we seek gratitude, praise, and appreciation from those around us. But these desires, these powerful expectations we have, inevitably become forms of self-torment. Because we have forgotten our real divine nature and we look for the infinite outside of ourselves, we become bottomless pits of need. We have to remember that with any expectation, we give away control over our happiness. We make our happiness dependent upon the actions and moods of someone else. We then give away that freedom that is our very nature. It is self-sabotage.

What turns acts of service into a spiritual path is an attitude of unselfishness—not expecting gratitude or appreciation or even notice. An attitude of loving service, putting ourselves in the background, remembering that we are literally worshipping the Divine with the simple acts we do and every kind and noble thought we think, is a sure means to spiritual growth.

This is practical spirituality at its best. As Vivekananda said: 'We are the servants of that God who by the ignorant is called MAN' (8.349). The Hindu tradition famously teaches the value of meditation and worship. Long before American women wearing spandex turned to yoga for self-development, the yogis in India knew that yoga took various forms and all of them were

paths to perfection. The Self that was described by the ancient yogis was not the one wearing yoga pants, however. The rishis spoke in rapturous joy of the Self, the Atman, that was eternal, birthless, deathless, and utterly free, whose nature was pure Consciousness.


Vivekananda insisted that we expand our vision and most of all, expand our hearts. He said: 'Believe in the omnipotent power of love. ... Have you love?—You are omnipotent. Are you perfectly unselfish? If so, you are irresistible. It is character that pays everywhere' (5.51). This is a very significant statement. Our character is to be perfectly unselfish and we are to love. If this sounds odd coming from a Hindu sannyasin, one who is supposedly dead to the world, let us remember that Vivekananda said: 'It is love and love alone that I preach, and I base my teaching on the great Vedantic truth of the sameness and omnipresence of the Soul of the Universe' (3.194).

And of course, he is right: '*Sarvam khalu idam brahma*; all this is indeed Brahman', says the *Chhandogya Upanishad*.⁹ The list of references could go on and on. Says the *Isha Upanishad*: 'Who sees all beings in their own Self and their Self in all beings hates none.'¹⁰ We read in the Bhagavadgita: 'Since by seeing equally God who is present alike everywhere he does not injure the Self by the Self, therefore he attains the supreme Goal.'¹¹

Thus if we can grow in unselfishness, this will lead to love. Moreover, unselfishness is the natural *outcome* of love. If our hearts manifest both unselfishness and love, we will be 'irresistible'. What does Vivekananda mean by that? That love, kindness, and goodness are as infectious as a cold. People will find that they want to be around us, that they feel good in our presence. They want to know why we are so joyful and peaceful. They will want to know our secret. Vivekananda said: 'All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction.

Love is therefore the only law of life. He who loves lives, he who is selfish is dying. Therefore love for love's sake, because it is the only law of life, just as you breathe to live.'¹²

We should never forget that the effect of one person can change the world. Even if we can make the life of one person sweeter, if we can remove their pain or loneliness or hopelessness or fear, then we will have succeeded in following Swami Vivekananda's message.

We all have that potential to be the person who can change the world for the better. Every one of us. Let us not squander the opportunity. 

References

1. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of*

Swami Vivekananda, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 2.208.

2. See <<http://moreintelligentlife.com/content/ideas/anonymous/vivekananda>> accessed 11 November 2013.
3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.4.
4. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.440.
5. *Complete Works*, 7.29.
6. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 3.1.1.
7. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1996), 218.
8. *Complete Works*, 1.338.
9. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 3.14.1.
10. *Isha Upanishad*, 6.
11. *Bhagavadgita*, 13.28.
12. *Complete Works*, 6.320.





Exhibition on Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda opened the floodgates of India's perennial wisdom to the world. 111 years after he left his mortal frame, humanity still looks up to him for solace and inspiration in a violent, restless, and intolerant world.

As a tribute on his 150th birth anniversary, Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, set up a permanent exhibition on Swamiji's life and message. It was developed and implemented in collaboration with the National Council of Science Museums. The exhibition is a mixture of modern state-of-the-art interactive exhibits, graphic panels, paintings, and dioramas.

Entrance

As one enters the exhibition, one finds three aesthetically composed graphic panels titled 'A Shelter for All', 'Come Thither' and 'I Believe'. The first exhibit is a large lenticular display showing Sri Ramakrishna and young Narendranath seated in the *panchavati*; the second is a large painting depicting Sri Ramakrishna's vision of Narendranath as one of the seven sages of the *saptarshi mandal*; the third shows a large map of the continents, using words that remind one of Swamiji and his teachings. These exhibits establish the special mission of Swamiji.

Childhood and Youth

As visitors proceed they find several exhibits on Swamiji's early life. These have been designed especially for children. There are two large electronic rolling displays that continuously show twenty different

incidents from Swamiji's childhood and adolescent years. There are also two interactive video kiosks where children can select and watch short animation videos depicting incidents from Swamiji's life. There is a beautiful diorama depicting Swamiji as a child gifting a cloth to a wandering monk from the first floor window overlooking a narrow lane. There is a large painting depicting the young Narendranath's first ecstasy on his way to Raipur sitting in a bullock cart, while sighting a huge beehive in a mountain crevice.

Training under Sri Ramakrishna and Discovering India

Two centrally placed large dioramas depict Sri Ramakrishna with his disciples, providing a solemn atmosphere. A detailed graphic panel depicts several important interactions between Narendranath and Sri Ramakrishna. Yet another video kiosk provides details of the early days at the Baranagore Math.

Swamiji spent three long years travelling throughout the country as a wandering monk mostly on foot. There are two major exhibits dedicated to this phase of Swamiji's life. In the exhibit 'Wandering Monk', visitors find a large graphic display showing the entire route of Swamiji's journey through several major cities and towns. In front of the graphic panel is an interactive display through which visitors can discover many anecdotes and details of the entire journey. A second exhibit called 'Kanyakumari' contains a large rendering of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial. An audio-cum-video narrative describes the events that led to Swamiji's momentous decision to travel to the West.

A Stereoscopic 3D Movie on Swamiji

Halfway down the exhibition is a small 3D Theatre. On either side of the entrance are two beautiful statues of Swamiji symbolizing his transformation from a wandering monk to a spiritual teacher of the world.

The stereoscopic 3D film titled '9/11—The Awakening', was jointly developed by Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, and Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi. The movie depicts Swami Vivekananda's historic speech at the World Parliament of Religions, Chicago, on 11 September 1893. The movie recreates Swamiji in painstaking detail along with the auditorium, stage, audience, ambience outside, and above all Swamiji's 'frog in the well' parable. Recreating a 3D model of Swamiji was the greatest challenge and achievement. The movie was developed at the Global Institute for Stereo Vision and Research, Chennai.

Teachings

Swamiji conquered the minds of the people through his message of harmony. The exhibition dedicates one entire exhibit to condense and illustrate the various facets and nuances of Swamiji's message of



'Harmony and Universal Religion'. A second exhibit presents Swamiji's teachings on the four yogas—karma, bhakti, jnana, and raja—compiled from his books.

Swamiji's various teachings have been presented in two interactive computerized displays. In 'Ask Swamiji' the visitor can select various questions and hear the answers to those questions in Swamiji's own words. In the exhibit 'Interviews with Swamiji', one can choose from various topics and listen to Swamiji's interviews.

Revered the World Over

Many eminent people worldwide were deeply influenced by Swamiji and have expressed their admiration in their works. In 'Revered World Over' many such observations by eminent people are presented in a multiscreen projection panel.

His Message, His Legacy

Swamiji's central message was his teaching of the divinity of humankind and how it can be manifested. He created the Ramakrishna Order, which would strive to implement his ideals of renunciation and service in order to attain spiritual realization. The exhibit 'Ramakrishna Order', is dedicated to show the spiritual significance of the various works carried out by the Order.

As the visitors complete their tour they can pay their respects to Swamiji at the exhibit named 'Shraddhanjali'.

Conclusion

This permanent exhibition, housed in the basement of the main temple, was inaugurated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama on 11 September 2012. The entire project was made possible by the generous help received from the LNJ Bhilwara Group. The exhibition is a major attraction and inspiration for thousands of people from all walks of life.



The Moral Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda

Prof. Dikshit Gupta



IN THIS PAPER WE PROPOSE to discuss if Swami Vivekananda has a moral philosophy of his own. If he does have one, our question is how to characterize it. We want to begin this paper by referring to certain statements scattered in his lectures or writings, which clearly embody

his conception of ethics. From these statements one can readily understand the uniqueness of Vivekananda's approach towards morality, which distinguishes it from that of the Western ethicist. The statements quoted here are mostly from his lectures on 'Practical Vedanta':

(i) The only definition that can be given of morality is this: That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral.¹

(ii) My idea is to show that the highest ideal of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand (2.355).

(iii) The more selfish a man, the more immoral he is (2.352).

(iv) Perfect self-annihilation is the ideal of ethics (2.63).

(v) The vain ideas of individualism ... have to be given up—say the laws of ethics (2.62).

(vi) Ethics is unity; its basis is love (1.432).

(vii) In all our actions we have to judge whether it is making for diversity or for oneness. If for diversity, we have to give it up, but if it makes for oneness we are sure it is good (2.304).

What all these remarks boil down to is that morality prevails when in our actions there is complete effacement of the self and the realization of the essential unity of all human beings. Abnegation of the self makes for detachment, which is the foundation for Vivekananda's ideas on ethics.

What Swamiji's Moral Philosophy is Not

Swamiji had an ethical philosophy of his own. It would be wrong to construe it as an academic philosophy, and, as such, it may not be accommodated within the framework of Western ethics.

Ethical discussion, however, is divided into two branches: meta-ethics and normative ethics. Meta-ethics is about the nature of ethics and moral judgements—whether we act from self-interest or not; normative ethics determine the *content* of moral behaviour and is about setting norms for standards of conduct. The word 'meta' means beyond or after; meta-ethics therefore involves a distant or a bird's-eye view of ethics. Swamiji does not discuss the question whether moral judgements are objective and, hence, his ethics does not develop into meta-ethics. The

ethics of Swamiji sets itself the task of specifying norms for human conduct and may be construed as a kind of normative ethics. But the standard or norm is in no way comparable to the norm set by the Western ethicist. Normative ethics in brief is:

We should do to others what we would want others to do to us. Since I do not want my neighbor to steal my car, then it is wrong for me to steal her car. Since I would want people to feed me if I was starving, then I should help feed starving people. Using this same reasoning, I can theoretically determine whether any possible action is right or wrong. So, based on the Golden Rule, it would also be wrong for me to lie to, harass, victimize, assault, or kill others.²

From a Western perspective, the central question for normative ethics is whether the moral value of an action is to be judged in the light of its consequence or by the fact that it is done for the sake of duty. The ethical theory which evaluates the moral value of actions on the basis of consequence is known as 'consequentialism' or 'teleological' ethics. On the other hand, the theory that proposes to judge action by reference to duty is known as 'deontological'. However, this dichotomy is not relevant to the moral philosophy of Vivekananda, for it cannot be accommodated within the straitjacket of either consequentialism or deontological ethics as conceived in the West.

Consequentialism is of various kinds, of which mention may be made of 'hedonism' and 'utilitarianism'. For both these theories, either pleasure or utility as consequence is the determinant of the moral value of action. Vivekananda has criticized utilitarianism in very clear terms besides lambasting hedonism. The term utility has been defined as the greatest good of the greatest number of people. Hedonism is simply the pursuit of pleasure. Vivekananda rejects utilitarianism on the ground that the standard set up by this theory

cannot explain the ethical relation of humans and 'we cannot derive any ethical laws from considerations of utility.'³

What repels Vivekananda in utilitarianism is the singular emphasis laid on the consequence as determinant of the moral value of an action, which is measured by utility. Vivekananda was not oblivious of human distress, and so the production of utility as a means of ameliorating human unhappiness was his prime concern. Distress must be removed, happiness of the masses must be ensured; but it must be the result of an action that is unselfish or proceeds from love for all. Thus the ethical philosophy of Swamiji could be branded as 'utilitarianism with a difference'. It is not the consequence of an action, but the motive that is important. An action is moral to the extent it is motivated by selfless love towards humanity.

Can we identify the ethics of Vivekananda as an instance of deontological ethics? Deontological ethics is the ethics of duty; the term 'deon' means duty in Greek. Thus deontological ethics stands for the theory that requires one to act for the sake of duty and not for the sake of desire or self-interest. Since Vivekananda asks us to practise self-effacement in all our actions, it is an exhortation to work for the sake of duty. Put in this way Vivekananda's ethics contrasts with Immanuel Kant's concept of moral action. An action has moral worth if it is done from the motive of doing one's duty.

For Kant, duty is a compulsion, a person's ethical obligation. Duty must be performed. Thus conceived, duty is a load on our shoulder as it takes away our freedom. It drags us towards an ideal that is basically uncompromising, demanding, or even exacting. Vivekananda compares duty with the 'midday summer sun which scorches the innermost soul of mankind' (1.103). In Vivekananda we find a definition of duty that is different

in spirit from that given by Kant. For Kant duty is a compulsion, a person's ethical obligation. For Vivekananda duty 'is the impulsion of the flesh, of our attachment; and when an attachment has become established, we call it duty' (ibid.). For him such duty is slavery. He says: 'How easy it is to interpret slavery as duty—the morbid attachment of flesh for flesh as duty! Men go out into the world and struggle and fight for money or for any other thing to which they get attached. Ask them why they do it. They say, "It is a duty." It is the absurd greed for gold and gain, and they try to cover it with a few flowers' (ibid.). Vivekananda's moral philosophy is not a philosophy of attachment and not an ethics of duty.

We have arrived at a negative conclusion: the moral philosophy of Vivekananda is neither pure and simple consequentialism nor deontology. How should we name it? But before that, it will be well to remember that Vivekananda made Advaita Vedanta his point of departure. The elixir of Advaita Vedanta is that Brahman alone is real and the individual selves are not different from Brahman or the supreme Self. The essential oneness of all human beings is the quintessence of Advaita metaphysics. This identity or non-duality constitutes the foundation of Vivekananda's conception of universal religion. It is non-duality, again, which makes for human fellowship or universal brotherhood.

Foundation of Vivekananda's Ethics

The moral philosophy of Vivekananda is a corollary of his concept of religion. It should be noted that for Vivekananda religion is not a doctrine, nor a theory, but one's realization of the essential Divinity that pervades all individual selves. The ethics of Vivekananda is based on the oneness of all human beings.

Vivekananda tells us: 'Oneness is the secret of everything. All is one, which manifests itself,

either in thought, or life, or soul, or body, and the difference is only in degree' (2.299). From this non-dualistic thought follows certain moral codes that seem to parallel Western thought.

Since all are one, there is hardly any difference between myself and others. In fact, there is no other who stands in contrast with myself. The distinction between 'I' and 'thou' vanishes. So I cannot do anything harmful towards anybody, for that will be doing harm to myself. This is the very idea contained in a version of Kant's categorical imperative. Codes of conduct or moral codes must be universally applied. What is good for me is good for another. If an action is not good for me, it cannot be good for you. Universality is the outcome of the oneness taught in Advaita Vedanta.

Another corollary of the above thesis is that human dignity must be respected. If all is one, we have no right to look down upon those who may not come up to our level of development. Therefore, the saying 'condemn none' is the most universal moral principle. Elsewhere Vivekananda writes that hatred is opposed to truth. What is the test of truth? Truth is that which makes for oneness. This is the quintessence of religion. Naturally, 'Everything that makes for oneness is truth. Love is truth, and hatred is false, because hatred makes for multiplicity. It is hatred that separates man from man; therefore it is wrong and false. It is a disintegrating power; it separates and destroys' (2.304). This conception of truth entails a criterion of goodness of human conduct. Whatever action makes for oneness is good and whatever action makes for diversity is bad. Goodness does not only qualify our action, it also characterizes our thought. Vivekananda says: 'We have to decide whether they make for disintegration, multiplicity or for oneness, binding soul to soul' (2.305).

Vivekananda proposed a religion for all human beings, reared on the foundation of

Advaita Vedanta. In a letter he said a person can look at all communities and religions with love and affection only from the point of view of Advaita. Vivekananda believed this must be the religion of the future human society. This is the essence of practical Vedanta, which looks at the whole world of human beings as one's own Self.

The philosophy of equality that Vivekananda preached for the world has its roots in Vedantic non-dualism. The concept of equality will be empty without an understanding of the identity of the individual and the supreme Self.

If you harm another person you will harm yourself, because what you call the other is really your own self. You pervade everything under and above the sun. You exist in every soul—the rich and the poor, the ignorant and the wise, the weak and the strong. The realization of yourself as ubiquitous makes you sympathetic towards everybody. The lesson of this monistic approach is if you do evil to others you degrade yourself. Thus it is clear that Advaita, oneness, is the basis of morality. Other theories of morality can impart moral education but cannot explain why one should be moral.

Ethics and Renunciation

The ethics of Vivekananda may be described as the ethics of renunciation. He said: 'Renunciation is the very basis upon which ethics stands. There never was an ethical code preached which had not renunciation for its basis' (2.62). He also stated that various ethical laws 'have that one central idea, eternal self-abnegation. Perfect self annihilation is the ideal of ethics' (2.63).

The above statements do not only bring out the essence of ethics, it also unfolds Vivekananda's concept of religion. The most significant characteristic of religion is that it exhorts us to give up selfishness and to transcend the ego. The motto of ethics is effacement of individualism.

We hear from Vivekananda that 'the highest ideal of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest metaphysical conception' (2.355), and therefore the more unselfish a person, the more moral he or she is.

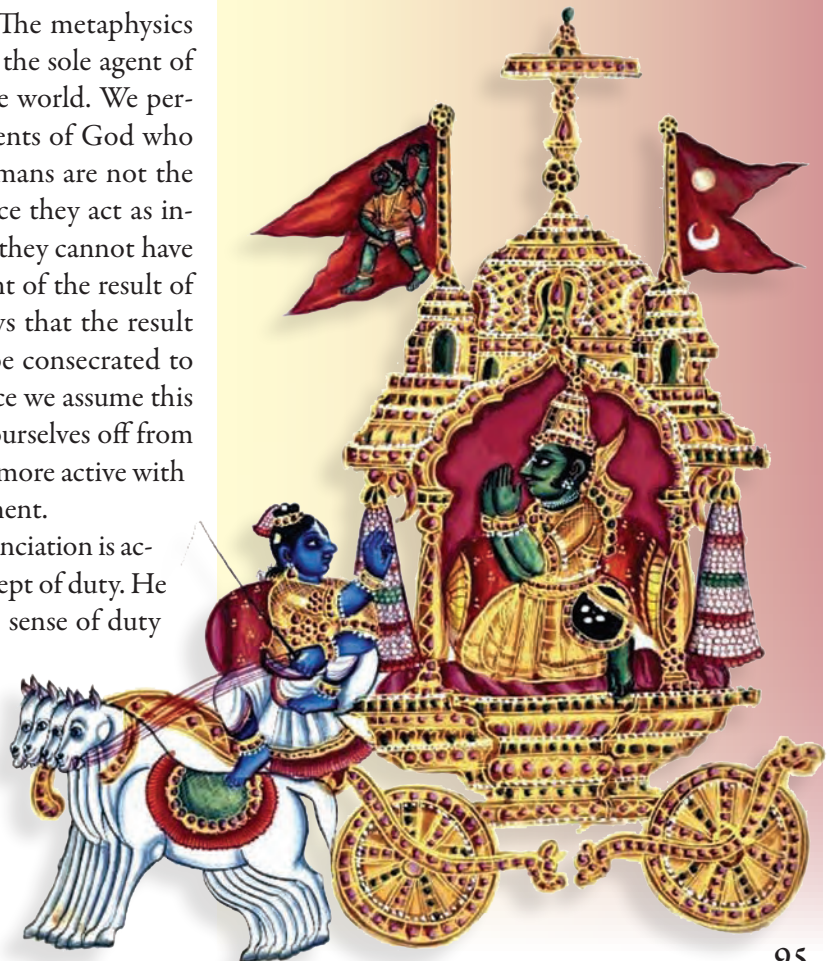
Understanding the relation between morality and self-abnegation requires a deep look at Vivekananda's philosophy of action and its apparent similarity with the philosophy propounded in the Bhagavadgita. Let us refer to karma yoga, which Sri Krishna preached to Arjuna. For Sri Krishna an action binds one to bondage so long as it is done with a desire to reap its fruit. An action is moral to the extent it is performed with complete detachment towards its result.

An action must produce its result. The question is to whom such result is to be consecrated if the doer does not share it. The metaphysics of the Gita establishes God as the sole agent of everything that happens in the world. We perform actions as mere instruments of God who is the real agent of them. Humans are not the real agents of their action, since they act as instruments of the divine agent, they cannot have any right to demand enjoyment of the result of action. The Gita therefore says that the result of all human actions should be consecrated to the supreme Person, God. Once we assume this point of view we do not take ourselves off from the field of action but become more active with the peace of complete detachment.

Vivekananda's ethics of renunciation is actually connected with his concept of duty. He tells us 'it is work through the sense of duty that leads us to work without any idea of duty' (1.66). Vivekananda believes this is how work becomes worship. Duty imposes no obligation on us so we can work without any expectation.

Vivekananda asks: 'Do you ask anything from your children in return for what you have given them? (1.59). Moral action is when you assume the position of a giver in which everything given by you is a 'free offering to the world without any thought of return' (ibid.). Attachment comes only when we expect a return.

This kind of detachment comes with love, which is possible only when the ego goes away. Vivekananda says: 'My idea is to show that the highest ideal of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand' (2.355). This is clear from his following remark, 'The only definition that can be given of morality is that: That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral' (1.110). Selfishness shows itself when the ego raises



its head. When the ego is neutralized love takes its place making an action unselfish and moral.

The moral philosophy of Vivekananda has a wider implication providing a basis for his much coveted spiritual socialism. The world has witnessed social upheavals intended to usher in revolutionary changes leading to establishment of socialism. One can refer to the American War of Independence and the French Revolution, which were initiated to bring fraternity and equal opportunities in human society. Human society all over the world is cursed with social and economic inequality, which must be removed. Vivekananda was deeply moved by the miserable conditions of the poor of India. He realized the distress of the poor and the downtrodden cannot be removed unless inequality of every kind is eliminated from human society. The different revolutions mentioned above could not realize the goal they were intended to reach. They succeeded only to replace one kind of imperialism by another.

The intention of Vivekananda was not to awaken the moribund masses of India and turn them into a political power. His was not a violent revolution effected through armed violence. It was a silent non-violent revolution making people aware of their oneness and inherent Dignity, which is the essence of Advaita Vedanta. It is

a call to humanity to realize that all are equal thus paving the way for a kind of socialism aptly named Vedantic Socialism.

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.110.
2. See James Fieser, 'Ethics', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/>> accessed 9 November 2013.
3. *Complete Works*, 2.63.



Role of Reason in Vivekananda's Philosophy of Religion

Dr Lekshmi Ramakrishnaiyer

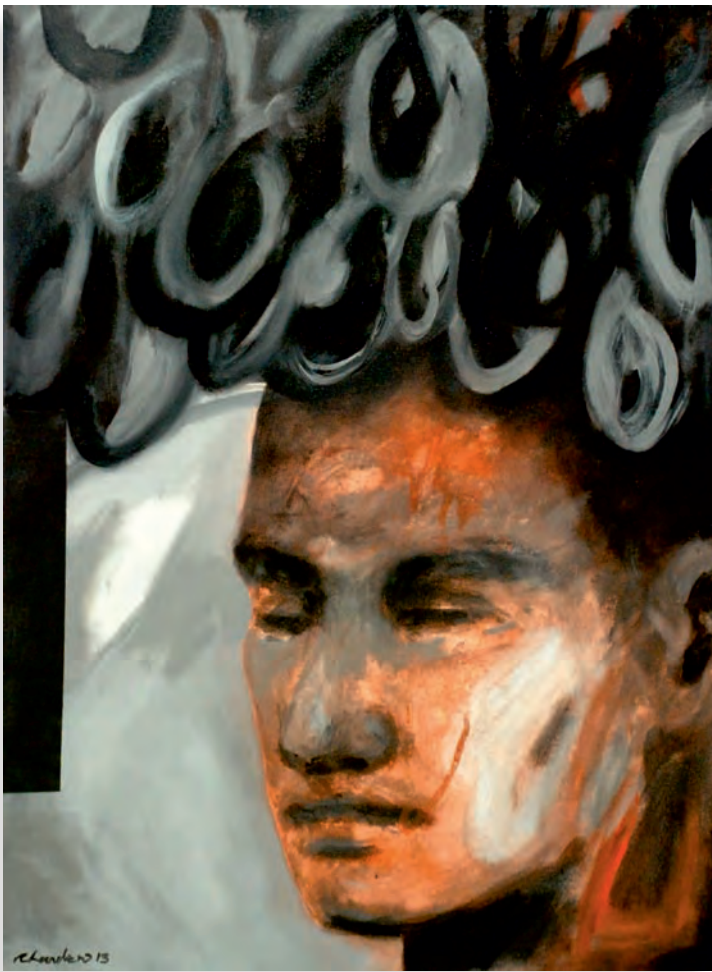
RELIGION IS BASED on faith rather than reason, whereas philosophy is a set of logically reasoned arguments. In modern times one hears much about 'philosophy of religion', which is a philosophical or rational approach to religion. In fact, both religion and philosophy need the support of reason but must ultimately go beyond its constraining limits. Swami Vivekananda, the philosopher of religion applies the above methodology in his teachings on religion.

Some Basic Propositions Religion Needs

Like any other science, religion can also be justified through reason. According to Swamiji, in modern times religions have become less and less equipped with reason and more and more filled with pseudo-arguments. There are of course a number of people who seem to acquiesce in the popular faith but theirs is only 'not-thinking-carelessness'.¹ The question arises: can the same methods of logical arguments and other ratiocinations applied to the sciences be applied to religion? Swamiji is firmly convinced that it must be so and the sooner it is done the better. 'The essential parts of religion will emerge triumphant out of this [rationalistic] investigation. Not only will it be made scientific—as scientific, at least, as any of the conclusions of physics or chemistry—but will have greater strength, because physics or chemistry has no internal mandate to vouch for its truth, which religion has' (ibid.).

In the absence of a firm footing in reason, religion tends to be what may be characterized as 'religionism', 'fundamentalism', or 'obscurantism'. The followers of each religion think that their religion is supreme, its ethical principles are absolutely true, or its scriptures are the most sacred. Fighting between themselves, different religionists cannot be the judges for themselves. It is here that we need a higher proposition, a universal proposition, which is higher than particular moral principles or holy books. Logically speaking, the truth of the particular is decided by grounding it on the more general, and the general on the universal. Swamiji says: 'There is something more universal than these books, something higher than all the ethical codes that are in the world, something which can judge between the strength of inspirations of different nations. Whether we declare it boldly, clearly, or not—it is evident that here we appeal to reason' (1,369).

Logical reasoning can take the form of either deduction or induction. The former is the way of reasoning from the general to the particular, whereas the latter is from the particular to the general. All sciences rely upon both deduction and induction. When a particular event happens it is explained scientifically on the basis of laws. So the particulars are to be referred to the general, the general to something more general, and at last to the universal. According to Swamiji, the last and 'the most universal concept is that of existence' (3,370). 'This is a good point to understand ... there is but One Existence, and



Whenever the mind finds a new thing or object it immediately ‘tries to find out its type in one of these pigeon-holes’ (3.370). This sounds exactly like Immanuel Kant, who speaks of logical categories in the process of understanding. Thus one can identify this kind of logical categorization or classification as what we call knowledge. Through this the mind ultimately seeks unity. Therefore knowledge can be defined as the finding of unity. Swamiji says: ‘In all religions of the world you will find it claimed that there is a unity within us. Being one with divinity, there cannot be any further progress in that sense. Knowledge means finding this unity. ... Take the science of chemistry, for instance. Chemists are seeking to resolve all known substances into their original elements, and if possible to find the one element from which all these are derived. ... Reaching that they can go no further’ (1.4–5).

Plato defines knowledge as justified true belief. If anything is to be counted as knowledge it must be justified logically. In fact, justification is possible in two ways: internal and external. According to Swamiji, an explanation of a thing—or justification—must be internal to it. Every science wants its explanation of things from the inside, from the very nature of that thing. This must be applied to religion also: ‘What is meant by science is that the explanations of things are in their own nature, and that no external beings or existences are required to explain what is going on in the universe. ... And this is one of the features of science which I mean to apply to religion’ (3.371).

Whether it is science or religion, asking ‘why’ is seeking a cause-effect relationship. Causation is also one of the widely discussed and dissected

that One Existence seen through different constitutions appear either as the earth, or heaven, or hell or gods or ghosts, or men, or demons, or world, or all these things’ (3.24). Thus all beings and all materials come under the concept of universal existence and the most general universal proposition is at once an ontological principle of Being. This oneness of existence also becomes the rationale of all ethics and spirituality.

The principle of unity is also an epistemological principle. Religionists as well as scientists ultimately seek this unity. While religion calls this unity Divinity, science calls it matter. The mind classifies and stores up a number of generalizations. Mind is, as it were, full of pigeon-holes where all these ideas are grouped together.

topics in Eastern as well as Western logic. In this context, Swamiji's insight of applying the cause-effect relationship to the scientific theory of evolution is worth mentioning. As we have seen, the laws of science hold that the explanation of everything should come from the nature of the thing itself. In other words, the meaning of evolution is that the effect is nothing but the cause in another form. The whole universe with its myriad life forms is wrought by the chains of cause and effect and is called evolution. This view is rational because it explains things without bringing in extraneous agents or agencies. This idea that the effect is not a new beginning but that which exists potentially in the cause sounds similar to the *satkarya-vada* theory of the Samkhya philosophy and Aristotle's principles of potentiality-actuality. Every effect is a reproduction of a preceding cause. In other words, cause and effect are but different stages of the same process *karya-karana-ananyatva*, non-difference of cause and effect.

Vedanta and the Requirements of Reason

Thus it follows that for religion to satisfy the criteria of reason, two things are important: the principles of generalization and evolution. The most universal of all generalizations should be infinite—absolute or impersonal. Again, it ought to sync with the principle of evolution. Only Brahman, the Absolute, can be that principle. Swamiji says: 'We have to come to an ultimate generalisation, which not only will be the most universal of all generalisations, but out of which everything else must come. It will be of the same nature as the lowest effect; the cause, the highest, the ultimate, the primal cause, must be the same as the lowest and most distant of its effects, a series of evolutions. The Brahman of the Vedanta fulfils that condition, because Brahman is the last generalisation to which we can come' (1.372).

Again Vedanta fulfils the scientific law that the explanation of a thing comes from within. According to Advaita Vedanta, what we see as the *prapancha*, universe, is only a manifestation of Brahman. It is called *Brahma-vivarta vada*, that is, the cause, Brahman, and the effect, *prapancha* are not entirely different. The Vedantic theory of causation is but *karya-karana ananyatva*. This sounds exactly like what the law of evolution says: the explanation of a thing should come from its own nature. Swamiji says: 'Everyone from the highest angel to the lowest particle of matter is but an expression of that one infinite ocean and the difference is only in degree' (1.375). Both modern science and Vedanta are trying to prove that the finer is more real than the grosser. That is why science leaves behind ordinary language and takes the help of mathematics. Vedanta leaves off the lower forms of religion, with gods and personal God, and ascends to the very pinnacle of abstractness. Considering science and Vedanta as two fields of knowledge they testify to Swamiji's contention that knowledge is the finding of unity.

To put it in a nutshell, one can see that the religion and philosophy of Vedanta satisfy the demands of reason that the particular is known only through the general; the personal through the impersonal; the changing through the unchanging; and the relative through the absolute.

Transcending the Limits of Reasoning

It is good to have a conception of religion with its firm footing in logical and rational grounds. But the question is: religion being primarily a realm of faith, how far does reason work? Is there any necessity of going beyond the parameters of all logical reasoning? It is a truism that in the matter of religion, Swamiji described reason as the necessary tool, which clears away dogmatism, idolatry, and the evils of priestcraft. No doubt, he had faith in reason and was certain that reason must govern

the conduct of life. He saw that in human evolution towards self-knowledge, men and women have to struggle against external nature as well as their own internal nature. To conquer external nature they need science; to conquer internal nature people have to practise religion. He said: 'I am sure God will pardon a man who will use his reason and cannot believe, rather than a man who believes blindly instead of using his faculties' (6.12–3). However, for his part, he was acutely aware that reason has definite limitations. It cannot, for instance, demonstrate the ultimate Reality to the thinking-feeling-sensing subject.


The goal of religion is to realize the real Self called Atman or Brahman, which is Absolute and Infinite, human intelligence and reason being finite, cannot realize or 'know' what is infinite. Paraphrasing Swamiji's clear explanation of the same point, it can be said that there are two elements in our perception, one coming from outside and the other from inside. I see a blackboard. What the German philosophers call 'the-thing-in-itself' of the blackboard is unknown. Let us call it x . The blackboard x acts on my mind and the mind reacts. The mind throws up a wave towards it and this wave is what we call the blackboard. Similar is the case with internal perception. The real self within me is unknown and unknowable. Let us call it y when I know myself as 'so and so', it is $y + \text{mind}$. So our whole world is $x + \text{mind}$ (external), and $y + \text{mind}$ (internal), x and y standing for 'the thing-in-itself' behind the external and the internal worlds respectively (2.458).

Thus it becomes clear that real knowledge is not what we know—not through intuition, reason, or instinct. Reason cannot know what x and y is; they are unknowable. But 'the-thing-in-itself', which is the most universal proposition, the ultimate principle of ontology and epistemology cannot be two but one. In other words, x and y must be identical. The differentiation might have

been caused by ratiocinations. Again, the ultimate ground of all logical reasoning should be the one principle that is beyond logic. Swamiji says:

All difference is, due to time, space, and causation. These are the constituent elements of the mind. No mentality is possible without them. You can never think without time, you can never imagine anything without space, and you can never have anything without causation. These are the forms of the mind. ... According to Vedanta, it is the mind, its forms, that have limited x and y apparently and made them appear as external and internal worlds. But x and y being both beyond the mind, are without difference and hence one (2.461).

Here one is reminded of Immanuel Kant's account of the illusions of reason through which he demonstrated the limits of reason in knowing transcendental entities.

Swami Vivekananda brilliantly exposes the parameters of reason in matters of religion. As a true philosopher of religion, he accepts the validity of reason in every field of knowledge, including religion. His rational mind found out how the logical operations used in modern science can be applied to the questions relating to religion. This would make religion dynamic by freeing it from superstition, dogmatism, and mythologies. However, as an adept Vedantin he succeeded in showing the limits of all ratiocinations and the necessity of transcending the level of reason to that of *vijnana*, special realization. This is supposed to be humankind's journey, from the relative to the absolute, from knowledge to *vijnana*. This beautiful analysis of Vedanta at once satisfies and combines people of reason as well as of faith. 

Reference

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.367.



Vivekananda's Concept of Religion

Swami Narasimhananda

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES do not generally mention the users' religion. What is religion? Is it necessary? Is it a set of rules to abide by, a set of beliefs, or an indiscriminate following by the not-so-privileged people? The word 'religion' is derived from the Latin *religare*, which means that which binds. Yet, apart from other meanings of obligation and reverence, it has come to mean a set of practices that liberate a person. Thus the irony of religion starts at its very definition. However enthusiastic and universal that definition may sound, does everyone believe in this meaning? It is clear that religion is a sea of dichotomies and contradictions, struggles and victories, strengths and weaknesses, bondage and liberation—it is a portrayal of the evolution of humankind.

Today, conventional identities based on religion and cultures are being questioned and new identities are evolving. Thus when traditional constructs are eluding us, we may well question the need for religion in this digital age. The answer can be seen in the words of a thinker: 'The rebirth of religion does not happen in times of political conservatism. Quite the opposite. It flourishes in hyper-technological times such as our own, in periods of major moral decline, when great ideologies are on their last legs. It's then that we need to believe in something. It was when the Roman Empire was at the height of its powers, when its senators were frolicking openly with prostitutes and wearing lipstick, that Christianity took root. It's a matter of natural rebalancing.'¹ This 'rebalancing' forces us to understand religion as a humanizing factor in this world.

Coming across someone of a different religion, culture, language, or nationality is a thousand times more likely today than in earlier generations. Therefore, we also need to understand religion to live in peace with fellow humans who have different religious affiliations. We need to urgently re-examine religion, and if necessary, find a new workable and cogent definition of it. Swami Vivekananda has given us such a definition and it is for us to understand and apply it to the religious and social field.

Keynotes of Religion

Popular ideas about religion are often narrow and misleading. Some ideas, however, point to a brighter and broader possibility. Vivekananda gave us a broad and yet minimal definition of religion: 'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, worship, or psychic control or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be

free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.'² This definition needs a careful analysis to find its relevance in the contemporary context. The keyword in this definition is 'soul'. It is interesting and intriguing that the subject was a soul to Vivekananda, not merely a human being. When we are busy fighting today for the rights of various identities based on gender and other factors, here is a portrayal of religion, an institution known to exist only among humans, as something belonging to each soul. Coming from a tradition that believes every living being is a soul, Vivekananda definitely meant 'soul' to apply to every living being. That is why he said: 'In the lowest worm, as well as in the highest human being, the same divine nature is present. The worm form is the lower form in which the Divinity has been more overshadowed by Maya; that is the highest form in which it has been least overshadowed. Behind everything the same divinity is existing, and out of this comes the basis of morality' (1.364).

The next keyword of this definition is 'potentially divine'. Apparent failings or imperfections are relegated to non-importance and 'each soul' is said to have the acme of perfection, divinity, already lodged within oneself. With the assertion of this potential divinity, the immediate conundrum that crops up is the observance of failings. How do you explain the now frequent rapes and shooting by psychopaths, with all their 'potential divinity'? To avoid rushing to pronounce this definition flawed, Vivekananda comes with the successive sentence bringing sense and pragmatism to the idea of potential divinity of souls. The next words, 'manifest this Divinity within' shows the necessity to turn the potential into kinetic or unmanifest to manifest. Divinity is inherent but not always pronounced. This explains the dichotomy of good and evil, and the layers in between,

that we are used to seeing in this world. There is another keyword 'the goal'. When put in absolute terms, like in this definition, 'the goal' assumes an overarching importance. This goal is not an interim one but a lifetime goal. Beginning with the common denominator of 'soul', the definition extends the commonality to the lifetime goal of all living beings. This sentence proclaims that all living beings have the same lifetime goal of achieving manifestation of the hidden divinity.

The next part of the definition deals with various means to manifest the potential divinity. It calls us to 'be free', and that is the next keyword. In contrast to the extant definitions of religion, both popular and academic, Vivekananda's definition does not bring any sense of bondage with it. On the other hand, we are assured of our potential divinity and are beckoned to start a journey to manifest this divinity and 'be free'. While religion is almost always viewed as a bunch of mythical, social, and cultural constructs binding an individual, Vivekananda's definition erases the bindings and stresses freedom. Some sociologists concur with this definition. We need a religion that is not structural but liquid and functional, catering to every subject. Summarizing the thoughts of the sociologist of religion Georg Simmel (1858–1918), a social thinker writes:

Simmel does not find religion able to fulfill the spiritual need of his time. The major problem is that his contemporaries look at religion as a set of claims. Religion has become a large, bureaucratic system that does not give room for the sincerity, subjectivity, and the expressive need that seems to accompany the new type of modern individuality. Simmel represents a romantic trend and emphasizes symbols, meaning, the unique, and subjective sincerity. He suggests a radical reconstruction of the spiritual life. One must fully grasp the meaning of the idea that religion is not a set of beliefs but an 'an attitude of the soul' or a perspective, a way of looking at the

world. Simmel shares the scepticism towards dogma, which was prevalent at his time, where the idea is that faith itself is more important than the object of faith. For him, reality is divided between the subjective and the objective, and a third realm is created by the interaction of human beings that may serve as a bridge between the two. In this way, religion is a reality capable of bridging the rift between the subjective and the objective. One may say that Simmel suggests an objectless religion, although he would hardly characterize it as a secular religion, which Victoria Lee Erickson does. The reason is that secular religion clings to a specific content, which Simmel rejects.³

Vivekananda's definition of religion relegates all 'secondary details' to secondary importance. These secondary details are generally considered the 'specific content' of religion. The spiritual is relinquished for the material. It should be the other way round. What is to be focused on is the 'attitude of the soul'. It is both interesting and reassuring to find thinkers like Simmel arrive at conclusions similar to those of Vivekananda's, albeit from very different points of departure set in equally different cultural contexts.

Freedom and Strength: The Litmus Test

One of the underlining aspects of Vivekananda's concept of religion is that it should lead to freedom. 'Liberty is the first condition of growth,'⁴ and it is the deciding factor of one's success in attaining lifelong goals. In the footsteps of his master, Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda advocated a catholic path to understanding one's personality. He was so liberal in the prescription of methods to 'be free' that he was open to new spiritual practices being adopted by the monastic organization he created, the Ramakrishna Math, after his passing. A prophet is known by the path he shows. Buddha is known for the eightfold path; Mohammad for his path of solidarity; Christ for his path

of love. Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of harmony and renunciation, and his illustrious disciple, are known for being open to all paths to freedom.

Along with freedom, strength was the *sine qua non* of religion according to Vivekananda: 'strength is life, weakness is death' (2.3). Religion should not be a weakening, binding, or frightening force. He exhorted: 'Mystery mongering and superstition are always signs of weakness. These are always signs of degradation and of death. Therefore beware of them; be strong, and stand on your own feet' (3.279).

'And here is the test of truth—anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true' (3.224–5). Religion is not weakening mysticism or lifeless mockery.

To Vivekananda religion was not sombre and binding but exuberant and liberating. This view is ascribed to by some other thinkers too: 'The Nazis used to shout "*Gott mit uns*" ("God is with us"), and were full of pagan religiosity. Once atheism becomes a state religion, as in the Soviet Union, there is no longer any difference between

'TOWARDS THE ULTIMATE', BY
TANUSHREE DUTTA - DRY PASTEL



a believer and an atheist. Either of them become fundamentalists, extremists. ... It isn't true that religion is the opiate of the masses, as Marx claimed. Opium would have neutralized the masses, anaesthetised them, put them to sleep. Actually, religion stirs up the crowds: it is the cocaine of the masses.'⁵ This 'cocaine' impels one to do things, good or evil. As Vivekananda said:

Though there is nothing that has brought to man more blessings than religion, yet at the same time, there is nothing that has brought more horror than religion. Nothing has made more for peace and love than religion; nothing has engendered fiercer hatred than religion. Nothing has made the brotherhood of man more tangible than religion; nothing has bred more bitter enmity between man and man than religion. Nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for men, and even for animals, than religion; nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion.⁶

Though religion has shed a lot of blood, it is also the lifeblood of many cultures, particularly in India: 'In India, religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life' (3.220). Vivekananda wanted a reshaping of religion, not its destruction, keeping it at the centre of all growth.

Why Do Non-believers Differ?

To understand non-believers, we need to examine the thought of some such thinkers, both past and present. During the course of this analysis, it will become evident that these thinkers base their findings on models of religion other than Vedanta, or even Buddhism. Vivekananda also had the same objections against the extant religions and redefined religion taking it closer to Vedanta.

Bertrand Russell was probably one of the most scientific non-believers of all time. He

believed that the very system of belief was unwarranted. According to him, if there was a truth in a statement, it had to be accepted. If there was no truth in a particular statement, it had to be rejected. Belief by itself had no meaning. Russell wove his argument around a wonderful illustration now famous as 'Russell's Teapot':

Many orthodox people speak as though it were the business of sceptics to disprove received dogmas rather than of dogmatists to prove them. This is, of course, a mistake. If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes. But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense. If, however, the existence of such a teapot were affirmed in ancient books, taught as the sacred truth every Sunday, and instilled into the minds of children at school, hesitation to believe in its existence would become a mark of eccentricity and entitle the doubter to the attentions of the psychiatrist in an enlightened age or of the Inquisitor in an earlier time.⁷

The religion taught by Vivekananda can be practised and its truth found by anyone who does rational experiments in spirituality, much like observations through a telescope. Vivekananda's religion does not require catechism!

Russell's position has since become the classical stand of non-believers, both agnostics and atheists. While Russell was an agnostic, thinkers such as the noted evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins are pronounced atheists. It is interesting to note that almost all of the non-believers have not considered Vedanta, eloquently preached by Vivekananda, as a thought system. Either they

were unaware of it, as in most cases, or had conveniently ignored it, as in the case of Indian non-believers. We understand this if we look at the reasons for non-belief given by Bertrand Russell or others. Recently, Richard Dawkins unfolded his arguments against religion:

The natural temptation is to attribute the appearance of design to actual design itself. ... The temptation is a false one, because the designer hypothesis immediately raises the larger problem of who designed the designer. The whole problem we started out with was the problem of explaining statistical improbability. It is obviously no solution to postulate something even more improbable. We need a 'crane', not a 'skyhook', for only a crane can do the business of working up gradually and plausibly from simplicity to otherwise improbable complexity. The most ingenious and powerful crane so far discovered is Darwinian evolution by natural selection. Darwin and his successors have shown how living creatures, with their spectacular statistical improbability and appearance of design, have evolved by slow, gradual degrees from simple beginnings. We can now safely say that the illusion of design in living creatures is just that—an illusion (188).

Dawkins bases his reasoning on the arguments for God found in Semitic religions, especially Christianity. He does not consider the cosmological model of Vedanta. Had he taken into account Vedantic understanding, he would have immediately understood that Vedanta has a better concept of the 'illusion' he talks of. Also, there is no designer in Vedanta, and the cyclical evolution and involution are very scientifically explained, more cogently than the Darwinian model. Vedanta is the best 'crane' here. How could Dawkins miss that? But he is not alone. Almost all non-believers ignore Vedanta. It is as though they have developed a 'blind spot' to Vedanta. While the task of understanding Eastern

religious traditions may be stupendous, that definitely cannot be an excuse for overlooking them. Explaining the apathy of media persons towards religion, a scholar writes: 'Ignoring religion has also undercut the coverage of some Iraqi politicians. In the aftermath of the Iraq War, journalists and diplomats often reinforced each other's preconceived notions and consistently misread the political scene.'⁸ 'Religious complexity compounds the effects of reportorial secularism: American religion is extremely diverse, making sweeping generalizations problematic. The great variety of faith traditions, the internal divisions within each, and other nuances of religions itself make good reporting difficult. Thus, reporters are often at a loss even to identify a target' (88).

Ignorance of Vedanta makes non-believing thinkers reinvent the wheel and suppose that they have arrived at an understanding of a workable religion sans conflict and write the 'Good Book.'⁹ The study of Vedanta would have saved these thinkers all the trouble, besides they would have been instrumental in taking Vedanta to a larger audience. All the reasoning against religion given by these non-believing thinkers is the very reason one should study Vedanta, as Vedanta does not have any of these shortcomings. For instance, Vedanta leads its adherents on a path of scientific and steady unfolding of one's personality without any rigidity. Alain de Botton, obviously not acquainted with Vedanta says: 'Religions have



been wise enough to establish elaborate calendars and schedules which lay claim to the lengths as well as depths of their followers' lives, letting no month, day or hour escape without administration of a precisely calibrated dose of ideas. In the detailed way in which they tell the faithful to read, think, sing and do at almost every moment, religious agendas seem at once sublimely obsessive and calmly thorough. ... How free secular society leaves us by contrast. It expects

that we will spontaneously find our way to the ideas that matter to us and gives us weekends off for consumption and recreation. Like science, it privileges discovery.'¹⁰ Alain de Botton is unaware, though not so blissfully, that Vedanta leads one to precisely such spontaneous 'discovery'. There is no regimen or drill in Vedanta, and it is this freedom from the 'rut of regularity'¹¹ that Vivekananda preached. One wonders whether these scholars do not really know of Vedanta or are consciously ignoring it.

Another example of this unexplained studied ignorance is the analysis of a philosopher who tells about, 'something central to my atheism: it is neither a conscious rejection of belief in God, nor a rejection of the possibility or desirability of a form of transcendence or rapture that takes me outside of myself or beyond myself. It is merely the absence of God on my imaginative landscape as a possible source of such things. God, for me, as perhaps for [Thomas]

Hobbes, is invisible in a very particular sense. God plays no role in my imaginative, reflective, or even emotional understanding of an engagement with the world around me.'¹² Considering that the author here talks of God in the limited sense of a God with form, or a theistic God, it is astonishingly ignorant for a responsible philosopher to jump to such sweeping conclusions without having studied Vedanta. Vedanta as preached by Vivekananda directs a person to study oneself and make choices in life. However, rationalists who have not taken time to study Vivekananda, claim that all religions are dogmatic: 'So, in the end, my central policy recommendation is that we gently, firmly educate the people of the world, so that they can make truly informed choices about their lives. Ignorance is nothing shameful; *imposing* ignorance is shameful.'¹³ A little study of Vivekananda would have shown this philosopher that not all religious thought is 'shameful'.

Towed by Western thinkers, some Indian scholars have taken to the academic fad of dismissing all Indian thought, especially ancient thought. Continuing in the line of a breed of scholars who have taken upon themselves to shout down anything having its source in a Sanskrit text, some thinkers like Meera Nanda believe intelligence and religion do not go together. According to her, intelligent people should not profess any religious affiliation. Further, she believes that all intellectual tradition has its roots in the West, particularly in Marxism. That the East has much more analytical traditions like Nyaya is a fact she has completely ignored. She writes annoyingly:

What passes as 'the left' in India today includes well-known personalities and social groups that I call 'reactionary modernists'. These groups are mostly associated with neo-Gandhian communitarians, who share the postmodernist and postcolonial suspicion of reason and the

Enlightenment, but *not* the postmodernist critique of existentialism. Thus, while they accept the postmodernist idea of cultural embeddedness of all ways of knowing (which reduces modern science to a mere 'ethnoscience' of the West), their view of 'Indian mode' of knowing and relating is essentially a Hindu, non-dualist mode, and their view of Indian community is an idealized dharmic, wholist community. (Can they be called 'contingent postmodernists' or 'strategic postmodernists'?). I call these intellectuals, including internationally acclaimed stars like Ashis Nandy, Vandana Shiva, Partha Chatterjee, Gayatri Spivak (in parts), Gyan Prakash, Dipesh Chakravarty, Veena Das, Claude Alvares and their numerous fellow travellers and followers, reactionary modernists because they seek to model their alternative modernities on the 'innocent', 'genuinely archaic' and supposedly subaltern modes of knowing and living, completely ignoring the fact that these same local knowledges are, more often than not, patently irrational, obscurantist and downright oppressive to the same subaltern on whose behalf these intellectuals claim to speak. Their *de facto* advocacy of Hindu tradition notwithstanding, these intellectuals retain an aura of progressive left politics because of their association with the classic left causes (anti-imperialism, multi-culturalism, feminism and environmentalism), although in my opinion, they are actually the bridge between the nationalist elements of the anti-capitalist left and the full-blown, fascist religious right.¹⁴

Meera Nanda's criticism is at once, naive, over-arching, reductionist, and dogmatic. She needs to understand that one can be intelligent and yet religious if one finds a religion that answers to reason as do many thoughts of the Far East. Enlightenment or intelligence is not the sole possession of the 'left'. One can study postmodernism, Marxism, and all other 'isms' and yet have an independent understanding of things. 'Cultural embeddedness' is not the copyright of 'postmodernism'. A

rational critique is also not limited to the post-modern ambit. And, to say that anti-imperialism, multi-culturalism, feminism, and environmentalism are solely connected to Marxism or leftist thought, is definitely taking things too far.

Many Indian scholars like her are aware of Vedanta and Vivekananda but are adamantly stubborn to open up to newer vistas of knowledge of mainstream science, which they claim to represent. She says: 'Like other reactionary modernists before them, neo-Hindu philosophers seem to accept the challenge of the Enlightenment. ... But, and here is the rub, they define the non-sensory, intuitive or mystical experience, the so-called "pure reason", to be actually referring to real, causal entities and/or energies, which can be directly "seen", or "heard" by altering your consciousness through yoga: mystical insight is interpreted as an empirical experience of natural order' (157). Of course, true to her nature, here too Nanda betrays an adamant ignorance regarding mathematical extrapolations of science based on the limited empirical evidence of cosmological phenomena or the discipline of altering human neural networks called neuroplasticity. This superstitious stubbornness is what Vivekananda was up against:

In modern times, if a man quotes a Moses or a Buddha or a Christ, he is laughed at; but let him give the name of a Huxley, a Tyndall, or a Darwin, and it is swallowed without salt. 'Huxley has said it', that is enough for many. We are free from superstitions indeed! That was a religious superstition, and this a scientific superstition; only, in and through that superstition came life-giving ideas of spirituality; in and through this modern superstition come lust and greed. That superstition was worship of God, and this superstition is worship of filthy lucre, of fame or power. That is the difference.¹⁵

Vivekananda's religion, which is essentially a rereading of Vedanta, is not based on any text,



personality, dogma, or doctrine. It does not even stress a rigid set of practices. It has no definite pattern, symbology, mythology, or ritual. The centre of this religion is the living being and its reason. Equipped with such reason, the living being is asked to embark upon the quest to find the truth, the truth at all levels. This is not against science but only true to the spirit of scientific enquiry.

Vivekananda was fed up with weakening theories and practices of the extant religions, which soaked up all enthusiasm and energy of its followers leaving them as inert as a mass of

jellyfish. To him the old religions had become a burden and the new religion, a necessity. The new religion was his perspective on Vedanta. He said: 'The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is an atheist who does not believe in himself' (2,301).

Religion: Public and Private


Vivekananda highlighted both the public and the private aspects of religion. On the societal level, he wanted India to hold on to religion as the basis of all its development: 'Whether you

believe in spirituality or not, for the sake of the national life, you have to get a hold on spirituality and keep to it' (3.153–4).

While there is lot of disagreement on the social function of religion, its private or individual function is accepted by most thinkers. Vivekananda stressed the importance of experiencing religion: 'Religion is realisation; not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. That is religion' (2.396). On similar lines, some sociologists have stressed the need for religion to develop as an avenue for seeking peace by the individual. They affirm the need for a private space even within organized institutions for the individual to express one's religion:

In modern, functionally differentiated societies, religious experiences of any sort have been assumed to be confined either to a recognized religious institution or to the privacy of one's own ecstasy. Religious institutions have become the sole social repository of mystery, according to this view, keeping it safely domesticated and out of public view. I would argue, however, that this is a very incomplete inventory of the presence of religion in society. *If we take structured-yet-improvised episodes of social interaction as our basis and recognize the necessary intersectionality of all such episodes, there is no a priori reason to assume that religious episodes will only happen in religious institutions or in private seclusion.* If it is true that all social contexts contain multiple narratives, that schemas from one social arena can be transposed onto another, then it must be true that under certain conditions religious narratives may appear in settings outside officially religious bounds. No matter what the presumed functional arena, narratives of transcendence might intervene.¹⁶

In sum, the goal of a human being, according

to Swami Vivekananda, is to arrive at a doubt-free understanding of its personality, and religion is this metamorphosis of the chrysalis into the butterfly, of the weak into the strong, of the confused into the enlightened. This is the core of religion; all other readings are mere veneers of this kernel. All unrest caused in the name of religion will be quieted if we focus on the kernel and let each individual have the freedom to adorn this kernel with a patina of one's own liking. 

References

1. Umberto Eco and Jean-Claude Carrière, *This Is not the End of the Book* (London: Vintage, 2012), 183.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.124.
3. Inger Furseth and Pål Repstad, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion—Classical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Hants: Ashgate, 2006), 39.
4. *Complete Works*, 4.294.
5. *This Is not the End of the Book*, 185.
6. *Complete Works*, 2.260.
7. Quoted in Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Black Swan, 2007), 74–5.
8. *Blind Spot: When Journalists Don't Get Religion*, eds Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Roberta Green Ahmanson (New York: Oxford, 2009), 59.
9. See A C Grayling, *The Good Book: A Secular Bible* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).
10. Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists* (London: Penguin, 2012), 132–3.
11. Henry Rollins, *A Preferred Blur* (Los Angeles: 2.13.61, 2009), 32.
12. *Philosophers Without Gods*, ed. Louise M Antony (New York: Oxford, 2007), 123.
13. Daniel C Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London: Penguin, 2007), 339.
14. Meera Nanda, *Breaking the Spell of Dharma and Other Essays* (Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective, 2007), 94.
15. *Complete Works*, 2.74.
16. *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michele Dillon (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 216–7.

Vivekananda's Theoretical Foundations of Oneness

Ben Todd Baker



VIVEKANANDA IS renowned for his illuminating discussions on the difficult theoretical underpinnings of Vedanta philosophy. In celebration of his 150th birth anniversary, I will highlight some of the central points that Vivekananda makes in support

of the philosophical keystone of Advaita Vedanta. A great part of Vivekananda's brilliance lies in his ability to embed sophisticated philosophical arguments within his writings on spiritual topics. We miss a key element of his message when we fail to recognize the firm analytic grounds on which Vivekananda bases his ideas. Further, it is invaluable for our own growth to appreciate not only the spiritual beauty but the analytic profundity of what Vivekananda is telling us when he says the Self shines through all these various things that we call the world.

For it is its nature to shine. It cannot be known; in vain we try to know it. Were it knowable, it would not be what it is, for it is the eternal subject. Knowledge is a limitation, knowledge is objectifying. He is the eternal subject of everything, the eternal witness in this universe, your own Self. Knowledge is, as it were, a lower step, a degeneration. We are that eternal subject already; how can we know it? It is the real nature of every man, and he is struggling to express it in various ways; otherwise, why are there so many ethical codes?¹

The essays and talks in which Vivekananda addresses these abstract issues are far too many to name here, so in the interest of continuity, I will draw from just his lectures on jnana yoga. Vivekananda's larger project in this piece is to delineate the path of the jnana yogi, one who endeavours to realize the truth not by relying on the power of faith or devotion to a deity, but purely by the power of his or her sharp reasoning. Vivekananda's discussion of the *jnani* is one who wants to tear away the universe from the Self by the sheer force of analysis. 'Nature is like that screen which is hiding the reality beyond. Every good thought that you think or act upon is simply tearing the veil, as it were; and the purity, the Infinity, the God behind, manifests Itself more and more' (ibid.). This is a perfect example from which to draw out the complex theoretical issues that surround the idea of non-duality. I hope to show that within a few sections of this piece how Vivekananda explores the dense philosophical puzzles associated with personal identity, the illusion of separateness, or maya. I will also include, in the discussion, causation, freedom of the will, and the existence of good and evil. The insights Vivekananda has to offer on these difficult topics can provide guidance to any spiritual aspirant willing to tackle them.

Existence is One

Swami Vivekananda explains the idea of oneness very directly in 'One Existence Appearing as Many'. Vivekananda tells us that the Reality 'when seen through the senses is called the world. ... When It is seen through the mind, It is called the world of thoughts and ideas; and when It is seen as it is, then It is the One Infinite Being' (3.20). This one existence, as he calls it, is the *only* real entity because the distinctions we perceive between phenomena and between bodies—in time and space—are false distinctions based in maya. As persons increase their understanding of the reality, they approach an ultimate truth: 'I am that One Existence. This is the last conclusion' (3.21). Because notions of *self* and *reality* are so abstract, it can be difficult, at first glance, to understand what such a conclusion would mean. It is further perplexing that this 'last conclusion' implies that practically all of the things we engage with in our daily lives are ultimately unreal, or fall under maya. However, Vivekananda's position is well-considered enough to answer these and other pressing issues that arise when articulating the idea of oneness.

Let us go deeper into Vivekananda's 'last conclusion' and examine what it means to identify oneself with the entirety of existence. Vivekananda's use of the first-person pronoun 'I' seems unusual compared to the way we normally hear the article used in conversation. It seems fundamental to 'I' that it refers to the person speaking, and that a person speaking is, by definition, *not* also the words they are saying, the others they are speaking to, the room they are speaking in, and so on. This sort of response reflects a very basic intuition that one's identity is a discrete fixture in reality, relating in various ways to things existing *external* to it; we generally take our identity to be *limited*. Vivekananda's project explicitly rejects this intuition: 'All these ideas

that I am imperfect, I am a man, or a woman, or a sinner, or I am the mind, I have thought, I will think—all are hallucinations; you never think, you never had a body; you never were imperfect' (3.9). Vivekananda denies that the proper referent of 'I' is a person at all, explaining that our belief in our personal selves is generated by an illusion. He illustrates that the principle of

non-duality should drive us to the belief in the true Self, which is all of reality, properly conceived of as a single, indivisible entity. Hence the thesis: 'There is but One Existence' (3.12).

The first concept Vivekananda presents that needs to be addressed is maya; what is the nature of this maya under which there falsely appear to be many distinct entities while in reality each



bears a uniform special property that causes us to say it is 'I'? Normally, when we talk about an illusion we implicitly assume the presence of some being that perceives the illusion and is thereby deluded. Call this being the 'subject'. The conflict arises when we see that the illusion Vivekananda describes is the very existence of that 'subject'. Who is under the influence of this illusion if not *I*, a person, a subject?² If I am truly the all-pervading entity that constitutes reality, then surely I cannot be under the illusion of *maya*. The notion of a subject, and therefore of duality, seems as inherent to the concept of an illusion as it is to our daily life, and so a tension arises upon investigation of *maya*, and the role it is supposed to play in reality.

This apparent contradiction is resolved by reframing our idea of the personal self as dispersed and incomplete, rather than as the atomic locus of perception we naturally take it to be. Within the world there are instances of perception that involve a sense of self, and some of these instances stand in a certain physical-mental-temporal relationship to one another that seems quite important *from within the perspective that arises in these instances*. Consequently, there forms the sense that these similarities constitute an identity, and we give that identity a name; the *subject*—in my case, Ben Baker.³ However,

according to Vivekananda the *subject*—like all other real phenomena other than 'that One Existence'—cannot be coherently described as a single entity, distinct from the rest of reality. The phenomenon is more properly understood as *subjectivity*, rather than as made up of *subjects*. It may come in various kinds and degrees, and there may be cases for which neither 'subject' nor 'not-subject' will be an appropriate designation.⁴ The pithy analogy often used to communicate



this idea is that of a wave. While we instinctively distinguish between one wave and another, we admit under scrutiny that our distinction is arbitrary. There is nothing implicit in the water's behaviour that forms the basis of the identities we attribute to individual waves. Vivekananda tells us that *subjectivity* is like this; the *subject* and the 'person' are, like waves, arbitrary and unreal identities that only appear to be distinct. Our personal identity simply is the amorphous occurrence of *subjectivity*, which entails an illusory sense of being discrete and separate.


When we understand this model of the person as diffused and ultimately unreal, we may become puzzled again upon considering what the view implies for *causation*. Rigorously and coherently describing the workings of cause and effect is a notoriously difficult philosophical endeavour, but that will be no excuse for the theory of Oneness if it cannot provide a satisfactory story of causation. Fortunately, Vivekananda provides such a story. He brings out the idea that there are different levels on which we can investigate these metaphysical concepts. We could, for example, discuss causation in human terms, which presupposes duality because of the nature of the human perspective. As long as we recognize we are adopting the stance of *subjectivity*, *maya*, which posits discrete entities that might interact, it makes sense to speak of causes and effects.⁵ However, if we take the discussion beyond this perspective to the level of ultimate Truth, causation falls entirely out of the picture.

Vivekananda says, referring to questions whose content is importantly related to causation, 'This question can only be asked within the limits of causation. As far as time and space and causation extend, so far can this question be asked. But beyond that it will be nonsense to ask it, because the question is illogical.'⁶ He also says: 'Cause is never different from effect, the effect is

but the cause reproduced in another form' (3.7). He says these things because, at this ultimate level, cause and effect dissolve into one—when we take reality to be one continuous entity it is no longer coherent to say 'A' causes 'B'. We are left only with 'A' causes 'A', which does not look like a statement involving causation at all, but rather a convoluted way of saying 'A is'. This should not surprise us, since Vivekananda's 'final conclusion' is really just the statement 'A is', where 'A' stands for nature, Reality, God, or whatever name one chooses for the entity constituted by all that exists. Vivekananda shows us that if we step back from the lens of *subjectivity* that is appropriate in the context of human behaviour, we will see that the worrisome questions about causation never even arise.

Vivekananda's insight to partition the discussion into the human level and the ultimate one will again be instrumental when our questions turn from causation to free will. Human freedom of the will is another favourite battleground of analytical philosophers, and Vivekananda certainly does not skirt the issue. He explains, as with causation, that the will is only a coherent notion within *maya*, the illusion we are distinct and separate beings. 'It is only when the infinite existence comes, as it were, into this network of *Maya* that it takes the form of will. Will is a portion of that being, caught in the network of *Maya*, and therefore "free-will" is a misnomer. It means nothing. ... There is no freedom in *Maya*' (3.14). Only from within the subjective, dualistic perspective, can we understand the question of free will, since non-duality denies that the persons or their wills exist, in the sense they would need to in order to be either 'free' or 'un-free'.⁷ If we truly want to talk of freedom we could equate it with the realization that one is not something as 'small and insignificant and individual' as a

person.⁸ Vivekananda shows us why the question of free will is a human one, a limited one, and ultimately, an unreal one.

Where we have found no such thing as causation or a free will, as one would expect, we also will find no support for the normal way of thinking about good and evil. Vivekananda makes it very clear that this One reality is neither good nor evil, but perfect. He says that good and evil depend on the development of our minds, and do not exist objectively. ‘As soon as he is free, he does not see good and evil. Who sees evil and good? He who has it in himself. Who sees the body? He who thinks he is the body. The moment you get rid of the idea that you are the body, you do not see the world at all; it vanishes for ever.’⁹ In the course of elucidating the life and mind of the jnana yogi, Vivekananda presents this basic philosophical position: multiplicity is illusion, reality is One; and so inherently relational concepts like morality and causation disappear under the lens that has not been cracked by *subjectivity*. These are the theoretical foundations of Oneness. They can be found everywhere in Vivekananda’s works, but it is up to us to possess the acumen and the resolve to probe the depths of his writings and reach these abstract pieces of wisdom. If we are successful—if we can come to really understand reality as described by Advaita Vedanta—we can stand firmly on the same foundations as did Swami Vivekananda as we make our own way towards the eventual realization: ‘I am that One Existence.’ 

Notes and References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.82.
2. Readers familiar with the philosophy of René Descartes will notice a close resonance here with the famous reasoning for which he is accredited: ‘I think, therefore, I am.’
3. This reasoning is reminiscent of David Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* and his ‘bundle of psychological states’ that he resignedly identifies as the sole grounds for what we normally take the ‘self’ to be.
4. See, for example, case studies on patients who have a severed corpus callosum as a result of experimental neurosurgery, cited in the third part of Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*. Such patients lack the use of a main channel of communication between the two hemispheres of the brain and consequently show signs of possessing two simultaneous centres of agency, or two ‘minds’. A short video describing such a case is available at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfGwsAdS9Dc>> accessed 1 November 2013.
5. It is worthy to note that, because cause and effect are based on illusion, there is no need for our definitions of them to be consistent under serious philosophical questioning; we admit, instead, that while we use these concepts in our lives, ultimately, they do not make sense.
6. *Complete Works*, 3.13.
7. It is a similar non-question to ask whether unicorns are free.
8. The quoted phrase is from Thomas Nagel’s essay, ‘The Absurd’, wherein he addresses the ‘conspicuous discrepancy’ between the seriousness with which we take our lives and our understanding that, outside of our own perspective, these lives seem arbitrary. His discussion is particularly relevant to Swami Vivekananda’s position on *causation* and *freedom* because of the clash between one’s subjective understanding of these notions and the recognition that they are constructs of the human perspective, and do not figure into the non-dual picture of reality. See *Life, Death, & Meaning: Key Philosophical Readings on the Big Questions*, ed. David Benatar (Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2010), 31.
9. *Complete Works*, 3.28. There is some interesting overlap between this idea as Swami Vivekananda presents it and a thematic contention of Friedrich Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* that prevailing ideas about free will and morality are contextualized, human inventions, ultimately referring only to themselves for justification.

Swamiji's Influence on the Religion of the Future

Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana

ABOUT A YEAR AGO some of us were riding in a car in New York State with the radio on when we heard the announcer say, in a Southern drawl: 'There's a beautiful weekend coming up, folks—a good time to go out and be one with nature.' It suddenly struck one of us: Would the phrase 'be one with nature'—or, one with anything else, for that matter—be popular if it had not been for Swami Vivekananda? We take that phrase so much for granted now, but what if Swamiji had never come to the US? Would anyone in the US be speaking or thinking in those terms? What the announcer himself meant by the phrase is anybody's guess, but the fact that it was said on public radio is telling.



Most of us live in a city, and we are used to a lot of background noise that gets partially tuned out—traffic noises, horns blowing, people talking, electrical equipment running, and so on. So when one visits a secluded place, the first thing one notices is the quiet. Even with birds chirping and other animals making noises, it still seems so calm and quiet.

Some yogis and realized souls might be able to hear the sound of Om in such a place. Or others might even be able to see the divine Consciousness behind everything—the ultimate Reality underlying this ‘framework of illusion’, as Sri Ramakrishna called it. But such people are extremely rare. Other people may simply try to imagine that divine Consciousness present in everything.

Still others would be happy to just be able to feel oneness with a life principle that seems to pulsate all around them. Perhaps they feel that the whole forest—the trees and plants, birds and animals, even rocks and stones—and they themselves are vibrating with life, with that life principle. This is, perhaps, what many people mean by ‘being one with nature’. But for most people, the term has just become a popular phrase, and they hardly stop to think about what it really means. Most people are happy to simply see the sights, hear the sounds, and breathe in the smells of the woods.

Never mind that this is not exactly what Swamiji meant in his lectures in the West when he talked about ‘the unity of all existence’ or ‘the whole universe is one existence.’¹ ‘Being one with nature’ is a good start.

Here we might ask: Did this really come from Swamiji? Is it really possible that Swamiji’s ideas could spread in such a far-reaching way? We must remember that Swamiji attracted some brilliant minds to his lectures and classes—particularly to his classes in New York City. These attendees were not ordinary people. Many of his

students were already—or later became—spiritual teachers in their own right. Later, in order to attract students, they would often advertise as one of their credentials that they were a student of Swami Vivekananda. All of these teachers then, in turn, spread Swamiji’s ideas to a greater or lesser degree.

There is one woman in particular we can mention here: Mrs May Banks-Stacey, Matre, Rosae Crucis America. In January 1916, *The American Rosae Crucis* journal introduced in their very first issue Mrs Banks-Stacey as the first head of their society in the US, saying, ‘She is one of the founders of Rosae Crucis in the United States and the Matre of the Grand Lodge of America.’ While giving her credentials, it is mentioned: ‘She has studied the mysteries of Hindoo philosophy under Swami Vivekananda, Abekananda [*sic*] and Baha Ullah, and also has been a member of the Theosophists Inner Circle.’² A person like her would have influenced many thousands of people.

Swami Abhedananda and other later monks who taught in the US also attracted leading writers and intellectuals to their classes—people like Joseph Campbell, Aldous Huxley, Huston Smith, and Pitirim Sorokin, to name just a few. Again, these people, in turn, have influenced millions of people through their talks and writings. Thus many people have been instruments in the spread of Swamiji’s message.³

Regarding *what* Swamiji taught and the impact of those ideas on society today, we shall look at a powerful lecture that he gave on 8 April 1900 in San Francisco entitled, ‘Is Vedanta the Future Religion?’ Here he gave what he felt were his final ideas about the Vedanta work in America. His ideas must have sounded quite revolutionary at the time to a Western audience, yet it was among the Westerners—and particularly those of the US—that he felt he had a good chance of working

out these ideas. So it is good to look back on this talk 113 years later and take another look at what this 'future religion' was that Swamiji had in mind. We can also see what is happening with those ideas now—at least in the popular culture of the West.

By Vedanta Swamiji was referring specifically to non-dualistic Vedanta. In this lecture Swamiji worked through—for a sometimes sceptical audience—all the possible implications of the doctrine of non-dualism. Consider the following, for instance. Swamiji said: 'It is one body, one mind, one soul throughout. Spirit never dies. There is no death anywhere, not even for the body. Not even the mind dies. How can the body die? One leaf may fall—does the tree die? The universe is my body. See how it continues. All minds are mine. With all feet I walk. Through all mouths I speak. In everybody I reside.'⁴

Is there no death for the body? Obviously, Swamiji is speaking here from the universal standpoint, not from the standpoint of individual bodies—that is, from the standpoint of one universal Self. Swamiji was a master at jolting people out of their complacency and their ordinary materialistic view of life with statements like this.

To make it more clear, Swamiji said: 'Immortality is knowing ourselves as one with



'SWAMIJI', BY BIMAL KUNDU - BRONZE

all, living in all bodies, perceiving through all minds. We are bound to feel in other bodies than this one. ... What is sympathy? Is there any limit to this sympathy, this feeling in our bodies? It is quite possible that the time will come when I shall feel through the whole universe' (8.130).

Here again, on this point, the popular culture in the West seems to be waking up to Swamiji. Just as the phrase 'being one with nature' has become popular, similarly the phrase 'we are all one' has become a mantra for this age. In a recent well-known comic strip, a rather sardonic rat is

coaching a little girls' basketball team. He is giving them a pep talk to inspire them to trounce the other team when a little girl starts talking about how 'all humanity is one—you know, one energy, one love'. She goes on to say that by their winning the basketball game they will make the other team sad, and the sadness a person causes to others really makes oneself sad. The rat is confused and cannot understand at all where this conversation is going, so all the other little girls then chime in to make it clear: 'Forfeit [the game]!' In the last panel of the cartoon a referee

'MEDITATION AT KANYAKUMARI'. BY INDRANI SENGUPTA
WATERCOLOUR (WASH ON PAPER)



blows his whistle and declares the game a 'metaphysical forfeit'.⁵

With or without the comic strips, this aspect of oneness is also taking hold. This aspect takes oneness to another level—to a true identification with other people, and not just with some nebulous 'nature'. The stakes are raised here, as identifying oneself with other people requires more of a personal commitment. It is amazing to see how this is taking place in the US now. People's awareness has been raised. More and more they are realizing that what happens to other people in another part of the country—or even in another part of the world—affects everyone.

We often assume that Swamiji emphasized the worship of God in human beings only in India. But we find that in this lecture Swamiji included this aspect also in his idea of the religion of the future for the US. As Swamiji said: 'Worship everything as God—every form is His temple. All else is delusion.'⁶ And again: 'Just now I am worshipping you. This is the greatest prayer. Worship the whole world in that sense—by serving it. This standing on a high platform [lecturing], I know, does not appear like worship. But if it is service, it is worship' (8.135).

Swamiji would be happy to see how many religious organizations in the US—including many Protestant churches—have taken up social welfare work. Except among Catholic monastics, this was almost unheard of fifty or sixty years ago. Now almost all religious groups in the US—Protestant and Catholic—take up some kind of work for the poor, such as organizing soup kitchens to feed the homeless; repairing the homes of the poor after devastating hurricanes and tornadoes; setting up day-care facilities for children of poor working mothers; or doing after-school tutoring for poor children. All these things are done mostly by volunteers from the religious organizations themselves, and not by paid staff. These volunteers use

their time off from their jobs, or even their vacation days, to do this service.

It is true, the philosophy of worship of God in human beings is not explicitly expressed when most of these people perform this type of work, yet those who do this work through their religious organization do it out of love of God, and they do it selflessly. This too is karma yoga.

Another point Swamiji brought up in this lecture is a rather controversial point, and it is, in fact, a topic that is being hotly debated now in the US. In the West it is referred to as 'being spiritual but not religious'. What Swamiji really meant in his lecture, only he knows; but what he said is this: 'If you take my advice, you will never enter any church. Come out and go wash off. Wash yourself again and again until you are cleansed of all the superstitions that have clung to you through the ages' (8.134).

Here, by the word 'superstitions', Swamiji was referring to the idea of worshipping a God outside of oneself. Immediately before this, Swamiji said: 'What is the God of Vedanta? He is principle, not person. You and I are all personal Gods. The absolute God of the universe, the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe, is impersonal principle. ... You want to worship personal Gods. It is the worship of your own self' (8.133–4).

Nowadays many people in the US are not affiliating themselves with a church, synagogue, mosque, or temple, or with any particular religion or sect. And many of them declare themselves to be 'spiritual but not religious'. Their main reason for remaining unaffiliated is that they do not want to declare their belief in any doctrines or dogmas that they cannot wholeheartedly accept.⁷ This is what *they* mean by 'superstitions'. This is okay; Swamiji would accept this. However, for the most part these people have neglected Swamiji's original

idea, his main point—that is, realizing one’s own Divinity. Unfortunately, when the debates on this issue come up, that part of the equation—the divinity of one’s own Self—is not mentioned. The debates only have to do with whether or not a person can find God outside a religious organization.

The divinity of one’s own Self was primary whenever Swamiji talked about non-dualism. As he said: ‘But God is the infinite, impersonal being, ever existent, unchanging, immortal, fearless; and you are all His incarnations, His embodiments. This is the God of Vedanta, and His heaven is everywhere. In this heaven dwell all the personal Gods there are—you yourselves. Exit praying and laying flowers in the temples!’⁸

This is the aspect of ‘oneness’ that has not yet dared to raise its hood in America—not yet, at any rate. Perhaps the time is not ripe for it now.

Swamiji, however, was hopeful. His final message in this lecture was:

For thousands of years millions and millions all over the world have been taught to worship the Lord of the world, the Incarnations, the saviours, the prophets. They have been taught to consider themselves helpless, miserable creatures and to depend upon the mercy of some person or persons for salvation. There are no doubt many marvellous things in such beliefs. But even at their best, they are but kindergartens of religion, and they have helped but little. Men are still hypnotized into abject degradation. However, there are some strong souls who get over that illusion. The hour comes when great men shall arise and cast off these kindergartens of religion and shall make vivid and powerful the true religion, the worship of the spirit by the spirit’ (8.141).

This lecture was one of Swamiji’s last in the US, and this was Swamiji’s conclusion in this lecture: ‘*Devo bhutva devam yajet*; one worships the Divine by becoming the Divine. Even if the time

is not yet ripe for this aspect of Swamiji’s message, we can understand that if other ideas have begun to sprout, this aspect too will come forth from the seeds that Swamiji sowed 113 years ago. As he said: ‘You may not like what I am saying. You may curse me today, but tomorrow you will bless me’ (8.135). ‘The hour comes,’ said Swamiji, so it will come.



Notes and References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 8.139
2. *The American Rosae Crucis: A Magazine of Life’s Mysteries*, 1/1 (January 1916), 17.
3. Interested readers can go through a wonderfully researched article of how Swamiji’s influence spread by Pravrajika Vrajaprana, ‘World Thinkers on Ramakrishna Movement’, in *The Story of Ramakrishna Mission* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 1097–143.
4. *Complete Works*, 8.129.
5. See ‘Pearls Before Swine’, 22 September 2013; <www.news.yahoo.com/comics> accessed 13 November 2013.
6. *Complete Works*, 8.136.
7. These days because of a decrease in attendance in Christian churches, many churches are dropping their requirements for belief in certain doctrines. For instance, fifty years ago people could not take communion in a particular church unless they had become members of that particular sect of that denomination of the church by formally professing their faith in the doctrines of that sect. Many churches no longer have this requirement. Anyone who wants to take communion can do so without making any doctrinal commitments. Again, a Christian minister recently told one of our nuns that young people will not come to his church if the church claims that ‘Jesus is the only way’ to salvation. Young people insist that the church must accept other paths and say that ‘Jesus is one of the ways’. Churches, out of necessity, are having to become more liberal to suit the times.
8. *Complete Works*, 8.134.



Swami Vivekananda: Bridging Tradition and Modernity

Benulal Dhar

WHEN SWAMI VIVEKANANDA was born 150 years ago, India was at the nadir of her long history due to centuries of foreign domination. Her national life centred on religion was stagnating. Even before reaching her lowest point, for centuries and as a natural reflex, people had coalesced in tightly held groups for their security and preservation of social and religious traditions. They erected walls of customs, superstitions, rites, and traditions around them and gradually each group was reduced to a closed and compact unit. They were extremely anxious to retain the forces of their tradition and culture against the odds created by military, political, economic, and other subordination. Somehow, within these walls national life held on tenuously. This hopelessly divided society urgently needed

one who would break the walls open—without destroying the life within—while merging it into a collective whole so that it received new vigour and momentum. Apart from the threat of imperial subjugation and alien customs, the scientific temper of the age was also knocking on the walls. Again, the need of the hour was to combine the best elements of tradition with the scientific temper of the age. It is exactly this huge task that was undertaken by Swamiji to lead India on the path of growth and development. In order to accomplish this task, he reinterpreted ancient Indian traditional values, assimilated them with the spirit of the present age, and used the Vedanta philosophy to put them into the practical application in all spheres—personal, social, religious, political, and economic. He says:

But out of the past is built the future. Look back, therefore, as far as you can, drink deep of the eternal fountains that are behind, and after that, look forward, march forward and make India brighter, greater, much higher than she ever was. Our ancestors were great. We must first recall that. We must learn the elements of our being, the blood that courses in our veins; we must have faith in that blood and what it did in the past; and out of that faith and consciousness of past greatness, we must build an India yet greater than what she has been.¹

It is this significant statement that we shall analyse and bring out its implications in this article.

Shaping of Vivekananda

Among the various influences that shaped the course of Swamiji's life and actions, the most profound one was that of his master Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji already had a natural intelligence for solving problems and helping others, and under his master this was developed into an unusual degree. Sri Ramakrishna also represented ancient India, traditional in its values, and firm in the belief of God's existence. Swamiji, with a modern education and outlook, represented future India. Just as there was tremendous love and respect between the master and the disciple so was the process of assimilation of the old and new India happening first in the mind of Swamiji.

For this assimilation to crystallize Swamiji had to travel over the length and breadth of the nation, to have first-hand experience and understanding of the nation's problems. He also had to become identified with the problems of the people and the country. These were his great days of *parivrajya*, wanderings, crucial in his development as a prophet. During this time he also found Sri Ramakrishna was always by his side in spirit—it was as if ancient and modern India

were travelling together. In fact, Swamiji was undertaking this task at the express behest of his guru and God. During Sri Ramakrishna's last days at Cossipore, 'The Master wrote on a piece of paper, "Narendra will teach others." Naren hesitated and said, "I won't do that." But the Master replied, "You shall have to do it." Some time before he had told Naren, "My siddhis [powers] will manifest through you in time."²

Throughout his *parivrajya* he understood that this ancient land had, 'withstood the shocks of centuries, of hundreds of foreign invasions, of hundreds of upheavals of manners and customs. It is the same land which stands firmer than any rock in the world, with its undying vigour, indestructible life.'³ Undergoing this process of understanding Swamiji points out: 'I do not believe in reform; I believe in growth' (3.213), and not in bits and pieces of reform. He wanted 'root and branch reform', nor the fanatical breaking down of things to remove the problems. Thus he patiently went about applying the remedy for India's rejuvenation.

Assimilating Modern and Practical Ideas

He was not an ordinary reformer or philosopher, remaining satisfied with mere intellectual exercises but a faithful messenger of God with a definite mission. First of all, Swamiji realistically identified individual, religious, social, and economic problems, and his assessment was not academic in nature. After extensive travels he realized that some social evils were due to religious orthodoxy, fanaticism, intolerance, priestcraft, and superstitions. The hard and fast rules regarding many aspects of individual and social life had sapped the vitality of the people.

Hinduism is a bewildering mixture of many sects, practices, deities, sadhanas, and rituals. He traced the golden thread of unity running through all the vast array of different religions,

denominations, practices, and sects and showed people the main principles of religion. Swamiji understood that the vitality of the people will rise naturally when unified. Instead of again investing that vitality in ritualism and small practices, he directed them to worship human beings as *Narayanas*, gods. Thus he went around the country and spoke with authority; for had he not been given the task by Sri Ramakrishna?

He also realized that lack of education—secular and spiritual—is the root cause of all weakness and misery of the Indian masses. Except for a few cities, the educational system was non-existent. In some parts of the country the vestiges of the old *pathashalas*, village schools, were still found to be somehow desperately clinging to life. However, the subjects taught as well as the teachers were not modern and so there was no scope for people to progress. These *pathashalas* were financed by the local benevolent people and their numbers were fast dwindling. The colonial government was more interested in exploitation than building schools in rural areas. That is why Swamiji wanted sannyasins, to go from village to village and door to door, to teach various modern subjects. He also encouraged the local rulers and rajas to start schools for the poor. Knowing that education was the one factor that would lift people up, he spoke of universal and free education. He declared: 'It is only when the body is weak that these germs take possession of it and produce disease. Just so with the national life. It is when the national body is weak that all sorts of disease germs, in the political state of the race or in its social state, in its educational or intellectual state, crowd into the system and produce disease.

To remedy it, therefore, we must go to the root of this disease and cleanse the blood of all impurities' (3.288). Today after a little more than a century, Swamiji's dream of universal and free education has become a reality.

There was also the friction between castes, classes, and different races in India that kept the country divided. Swamiji saw this was setting back national development. Here, with his vast erudition and powers of conviction, he showed them the common grounds of ancestry, race, and the real meaning of castes. He said: 'The time has come when for the well-being of ourselves, for the well-being of our race, we must give up all our little quarrels and differences. Be sure, these



quarrels are entirely wrong; they are condemned by our scriptures, forbidden by our forefathers; and those great men from whom we claim our descent, whose blood is in our veins, look down with contempt on their children quarrelling about minute differences' (ibid.).

Swamiji correctly diagnosed that people had lost faith in themselves. Here he invoked the practical teachings of the Vedanta, which teaches faith in the guru and the shastras, but with a modification: he preached faith in oneself first. 'Faith in ourselves will do everything. I have experienced it in my own life, and am still doing so; and as I grow older that faith is becoming stronger and stronger. He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religion said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is an atheist who does not believe in himself' (2.301). Thus Swamiji preached faith in oneself as a new religion by applying the principles of Vedanta to work for the amelioration of the nation.

But Swamiji points out that this faith in oneself is not selfish faith, that is, faith in one's own ego. As the individual soul is the reflection of Brahman, one should have faith in this absolute Reality that runs through and pervades everything, and which is the source of infinite purity, freedom, love, and power. It is to have faith in one's own Divinity.

Appealing to the Ancient Indian Tradition

Swamiji knew that social or national improvement has to have a solid foundation. All improvements and developments are secondary and will become useless if there is no religion and spirituality. That Swamiji blends the traditional wisdom with the spirit of modernity is once again reflected in his approach to religion. While recognizing the necessity of religion in human life, he says stirringly:

We have seen that our vigour, our strength, nay, our national life is in our religion. I am not going to discuss now whether it is right or not, whether it is correct or not, whether it is beneficial or not in the long run, to have this vitality in religion, but for good or evil it is there; you cannot get out of it, you have it now and for ever, and you have to stand by it, even if you have not the same faith that I have in our religion. You are bound by it, and if you give it up, you are smashed to pieces. That is the life of our race and that must be strengthened. You have withstood the shocks of centuries simply because you took great care of it, you sacrificed everything else for it. Your forefathers underwent everything boldly, even death itself, but preserved their religion. Temple after temple was broken down by the foreign conqueror, but no sooner had the wave passed than the spire of the temple rose up again. Some of these old temples of Southern India and those like Somnath of Gujarat will teach you volumes of wisdom, will give you a keener insight into the history of the race than any amount of books. Mark how these temples bear the marks of a hundred attacks and a hundred regenerations, continually destroyed and continually springing up out of the ruins, rejuvenated and strong as ever! That is the national mind, that is the national life-current. Follow it and it leads to glory. Give it up and you die; death will be the only result, annihilation the only effect, the moment you step beyond that life-current (3.289).

In this way Swamiji showed us our real source of strength and how to develop it. To him everything—individual, social, and national—should stand on this identity and character of the nation.

He spoke of the importance of culture and refinement. He said that even those with education behaved like animals if they are merely scratched. He wanted people to know that with all the knowledge they can acquire they also

needed the stability of culture. It is culture that gives dignity and prestige. He therefore encouraged the study of Sanskrit saying that with Sanskrit learning comes culture that can withstand shocks. This is the one language that could also unify the people into developing a national consciousness.

He encouraged the cottage and village industries of manufacturing handicrafts and items of daily use, which would take care of their domestic and local wants, bring down unemployment, and at the same time help preserve traditional arts and crafts. He also encouraged the setting up of vocational training schools. This is one of the reasons he went to the US; to obtain help and know-how for local industries to develop. Industrialists and traders were requested to look for local materials and processes that could create wealth and employment.

Raising the Masses

All through his travels Swamiji became acutely aware of the need to raise the masses. These people, long neglected and exploited, had to be raised for India to rise. He said that those who were educated at their expense and yet did nothing for them were traitors. He had little hope in the rich and moneyed people and spoke of the real India that lived in the villages. It was his first-hand experience of dehumanizing social, economic, and religious conditions of the Indian masses that led him to reinterpret Vedanta. Swamiji's emphasis on the Vedantic identification of the human being as the true abode of the Divine was to exalt the dignity of a human being. He realized that it would be of no use to have the knowledge of Vedanta unless and until it was reflected in compassionate behaviour towards the downtrodden suffering from hunger, ignorance, disease, and prejudice. Swamiji realized the stark reality of Indian masses as he wrote:

The nation is sinking, the curse of unnumbered millions is on our heads—those to whom we have been giving ditch-water to drink when they have been dying of thirst and while the perennial river of water was flowing past, the unnumbered millions whom we have allowed to starve in sight of plenty, the unnumbered millions to whom we have talked of Advaita and whom we have hated with all our strength, the unnumbered millions for whom we have invented the doctrine of Lokachara (usage), to whom we have talked theoretically that we are all the same and all are one with the same Lord, without even an ounce of practice (3.431).

Again, his famous phrase 'jiva is Shiva' indicates that he held humankind in high esteem. He was not a so-called spiritual guru whose only task is to preach the spiritual truth to the common people, but a karma-yogi of highest order, who initiated work towards their uplift. Accordingly, he responded to the challenge by including in the range of his services to the masses, economic, social, and spiritual benefits. Grounded as he was in the highest plane of Vedanta he made a down-to-earth approach to the problems of the masses: 'What we want is not so much spirituality as a little of the bringing down of the Advaita into the material world. First bread and then religion. We stuff them too much with religion, when the poor fellows have been starving. No dogmas will satisfy the cravings of hunger' (3.432).

In today's parlance, Swamiji can be called an apostle of 'human rights'. If we regard the innate dignity of a human being as the foundation of human rights, then Swamiji obviously lays stress on this dignity because of the inherent Divinity of humankind taught in the Vedanta. Vedanta was for long ages preached to highly qualified aspirants, but he made the basic principles simple to understand and preached it to one and all. This was an astounding development in Vedanta philosophy. No longer was it



reserved for a select few but for all. This was important because it had to be taught to all types of minds who could understand it. The second step of practicality was applying Vedanta to the concrete problems of social life. It was no longer the preserve of monks and pundits but of the common people in every walk of life. It is on account of this Vedantic analysis of human dignity that he can be regarded as a human rights *thinker*. And secondly, Vivekananda can also be said to be a human rights *activist* of highest order for his sincere crusade against all forms of oppression, prejudice, and ignorance. In keeping with his Vedantic understanding of human

dignity, he dedicated his life to the service of what he called 'God in human form'. His practical Vedanta thus reconciles spirituality with material life and thereby aims at fulfilling both the secular and spiritual needs of society.

What the country also needed was to learn how to work conjointly in an organized method. He set up an organization called the Ramakrishna Order to give his ideals a concrete shape and to lead the disorganized society. By organizing the monks, which was first done by Buddha and later formalized by Acharya Shankara, Swamiji brought the old methods into a new type of organization for the present age. The tremendous power of unselfishness would not only bring good to society but also bring people to their senses when they saw monks, ordinarily venerated, doing the work that they were supposed to do. Today the Ramakrishna Order, with its various branches, acts like a

template for many monastic and non-monastic organizations that are doing good to society in various fields.

Bringing Hope

Swamiji knew that as society progresses there will always be pressures, exploitation, unhappiness, and misery in the lives of individuals. This scenario is amply evident in today's world where stress and anxiety are ruining the mental health of people. Coping with oneself and the world around is becoming a daily battle. It is here that Swamiji brings in the knowledge of the Atman as the sure antidote to overcome all problems.

Vedanta insists that every person has infinite power, purity, and bliss that need to be manifested. Swamiji says that it is the veil of ignorance that needs to be removed to realize there is no darkness around and we possess all the powers of the universe. It is the greatest 'error' to think one's own self as weak, sinful, miserable, and impure. Again, when one says that one is a mortal being, one is telling the biggest of all lies. Vedanta teaches strength. Swamiji says:

Think not that you are weak and miserable. Almighty, arise and awake, and manifest your own nature. It is not fitting that you think yourself a sinner. It is not fitting that you think yourself weak. Say that to the world, say it to yourselves, and see what a practical result comes, see how with an electric flash everything is manifested, how everything is changed. Tell that to mankind, show them their power. Then we shall learn how to apply it in our daily lives (2.304).

Vedanta preaches that the one Atman pervades all life and existence. The difference we observe is due to our ignorance, which has separated us from the world and universal life. When life and the world are perceived from the standpoint of Vedanta, no differences are observed. Swamiji further argues that what makes for oneness is truth. Love is truth, for it integrates and binds all creation together. On the contrary, hatred makes for multiplicity and distinctions. All beings are but the reflections of the one Reality. He writes: 'Love binds, love makes for that oneness. You become one, the mother with the child, families with the city, the whole world becomes one with the animals. For love is Existence, God himself; and all this is the manifestation of that One Love, more or less expressed. The difference is only in degree, but it is the manifestation of One Love throughout' (2.304).

Accordingly, Swamiji argues that in love, one discovers oneself in the object of love. Thus one who loves is identical with the one who is loved—both are reflections of the same Brahman.

Using the Inherent Urge for Religion

Religion and religious thought has been the one guiding factor in human societies. This urge for religion is innate and is why all cultures have some form of religious belief. People are not just slaves of the mundane world, remaining satisfied only with materialistic needs, but aspire for a higher kind of life. This craving to go beyond this present existence and embrace the Divine is the urge called religion. Hence the essence of religion does not lie in the external world but within the human heart; this is a growth from within. The task of any religion is to guide one to the goal.

Historically speaking, there are different religions having different beliefs, codes, and rites, and they have been quarrelling with each other throughout the ages. Though religion has brought peace, love, and happiness, nothing has created so much hatred, enmity, and horror among the people as religion has. Further, the cause of such disaster is that each religion claims its own doctrine as superior, and hence it has exclusive rights to live and expand even at the cost of so-called 'other' religions. Swamiji realized that despite open clashes and conflicts among religions, no religion has died out; rather each of them has continued to sustain and expand in different corners of the world.

Swamiji declared that as there are many types of minds there will be many types of religions in the world. Each religion has its share of ground to operate. Swamiji said it is a truism to have variation in thought, and it is futile to expect that all religions, sects, or individuals would conform to the same set of ideas, beliefs, and codes. The variation in thoughts must be there,

for it is the sign of life. The differences of opinion are natural and a sign of healthy living. 'If you and I and all who are present here were to think exactly the same thoughts, there would be no thoughts for us to think. We know that two or more forces must come into collision in order to produce motion. It is the clash of thought, the differentiation of thought, that awakes thought. ... Whirls and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. There are no whirlpools in stagnant, dead water' (2.363).


Therefore Swamiji was the first to speak about interreligious dialogue in the West and intra-religious dialogue in Hinduism to iron down the differences. He said: 'I believe that they [religions] are not contradictory; they are supplementary. Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth, spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is, therefore, addition; not exclusion. That is the idea' (2.365).

But then, a question arises: How can all the variety of views be true at the same time? Just as the photograph of a temple taken from different angles and corners look different, but represent the same temple, similarly, we perceive the truth from different sides. The perception of truth is defined by birth, education, experience, and surroundings. Similarly, the representations of God by religions may *appear* contradictory but ultimately they supplement each other.

This is where Swamiji brings in the Vedanta, which can become the rationale of all religions because it is broad and catholic in outlook and is capable of accommodating all individual viewpoints within its fold. It is open to all individuals irrespective of caste, nationality, gender, and race. Vedanta will be the essence of all religions, for Swamiji believed that a person never progresses from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower truth to higher truth. The

watchword of Vedanta, according to Swamiji, is *acceptance* and not exclusion. Acceptance is different from toleration. For him, it is 'blasphemy' to think that one who belongs to a particular religion allows the person of another religion to practise his or her own religion. In this sense, toleration implies something is being allowed in spite of being wrong. Swamiji suggests we adopt the policy of acceptance. He clarifies:

I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one (2.374).

These are some of the areas Swami Vivekananda applied his prophetic intellect and heart to uplift humankind. We must also not forget that Sri Ramakrishna said his powers would in time manifest through Swami Vivekananda. As the world is progressing to newer levels and encountering bigger problems, we are witnessing a greater manifestation of that power in the world. 150 years ago India was at the nadir but she kept moving up and will, as predicted by Swami Vivekananda, reach her zenith. We can bring about this glorious age by working hard to implement his ideas. 

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 3.285-6.
2. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 1.182.
3. *Complete Works*, 3.285.

The Open Arms of Religious Congeniality

Babaji Bob Kindler

STREWN ACROSS the thickly seeded fields of religious opposition, competition, and oppression, are a host of unsavoury impediments to religious tolerance, what to speak of a resistance to humanistic amelioration leading to spiritual understanding. Bigotry, narrow-mindedness, pride, sense of superiority, ill-will, inflicting violence for the sake of a personal religious cause—these are just a few of the noticeable and detrimental growths found in that blood-stained soil with its violent history.



On the other hand, in the pristine higher elevations and atmospheres of religious and spiritual concrescence are to be found the well-established forests of eternal and ongoing principles: open-mindedness, willingness to learn from others, absence of warring regarding opinions and ideologies, recognition of the equality in all souls—these welcome and refreshing stations reflect the one true God that those who seek harmony and unity worship devoutly, no matter what their religious affiliation or preference.

The Undeniable Advantages of Non-duality

Upon scrutiny of all the choices that a sincere spiritual seeker can make in the fields of spiritual pathways and religions, a distinct advantage is enjoyed by those who intuitively know the formless nature of divine Reality. Once upon a time, in India, during the time of the rishis the principle of formlessness was understood and taught fearlessly, especially to the youth in whose hands the future and well-being of society depended.

In present times, this axiom of the formless nature of reality has become obscured by the prevalence of inferior forms of thinking around religious faith. This is due mostly to the growth and presence of spiritual superstition masquerading as the status quo in today's churches and temples, itself based in the senseless chase after wealth and popular following. But the human soul is inherently noble, and no ruse of this kind can prevail for long. As Swami Vivekananda observed: 'As soon as human beings *perceive* the glory of the Vedanta, all abracadabras fall off of themselves. This has been my uniform experience. Whenever mankind attains a higher vision, the lower vision disappears of itself.'¹

This higher vision, called Advaita Vedanta, though present in some form or another in many

religious traditions of the world, is heavily pronounced and emphasized in Indian religion and philosophy. Its exportation from the East to the West in recent times has not been without difficulties, but this is because the maxim of non-dualism has not been brought out of Western forms of religion. Moreover, Western philosophy has busied itself with the limits of rational intellectualism and the distractions of argumentation instead of proving truth via contemplative exploration and apt conclusion.

Truth is expressed in Advaita Vedanta by such mantras as: 'In the beginning this was Existence alone, One only, without a second;'² and, 'Thou art That' (6.16.2). Brahman is *nitya*, eternal, existence. To explain this important point in contemporary terminology one could declare that *nothing does not exist*; there is no such thing as ultimate voidness. There is always 'that', which observes the void and gives it its name and existence as a principle or a concept. Though a subtle teaching, this is not hard to comprehend. What is more difficult, however, is convincing people of a materialistic, pleasure-seeking society to invest thought, effort, and even interest into realizing such subtleties. As the great Swami Vivekananda, the bold and fearless champion of Advaita in this age, declares: 'To put the Hindu ideas into English, and then to make out of dry philosophy, intricate mythology, and queer startling psychology a religion that shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest mind, is a task that only those can understand who have attempted it.'³

The Competition

What stands as an apparent contradiction to the non-dual path of Advaita, and is often seen as being in direct contrast to the axiom of formlessness, is the presence of the personal God in the

minds of the people. The Ishta Devata, Chosen Ideal, as called in India, is both sweet and easy of comprehension—at least to those possessed of that most beneficial quality called faith.

But here, Indian philosophy is the testing ground, the proof, and the integration. Never satisfied to render divine Reality in terms of superiority and inferiority, or any other conflicting duality, Indian seers avoided the subtle traps of comparison and competition and opted for the route of synthesis instead. After intense scrutiny of both form and formlessness—what they termed Ishta Devata and Brahman—the meditators of this unique land and tradition espied the One in the many, and the many proceeding out of the One. ‘That (Existence) saw, “I shall become many;”’⁴ ‘That (Brahman) having created, entered into that very thing. And having entered there, it became the formed and the formless, the defined and the undefined, the sustaining and the non-sustaining, the sentient and the insentient, the true and the untrue. Truth became all this that there is. They call that (Brahman) Truth.’⁵ This was true not only of their philosophical stations and assignments but of their pantheon of deities as well, the like and expanse of which few countries or societies, if any, have ever matched. To these great minds, the one God was deemed and termed limitless, but also capable of breaking into a limit, if God so wished. In such a comprehensive rendering and realization, where was the room for dissension or disagreement with regard to God with form and the formless reality?

But whereas this Reality was perceived as limitless, the rishis knew the human mind was not—its limits, shortcomings, and stumbling are legion. Through such a veiled mechanism, Reality remains obscure or is taken for granted. As a result, its real import fell victim to the ills

of fundamentalism throughout religious history. Fundamentalism is not even a true dualism. Authentic dualism in India is based on two truths: first, God exists; and second, that even where dualism has its sway, the individual, jivatman, and God, Paramatman, are intrinsically connected, never separate. But in the West, and especially in this Americanized era, dualism is more a matter of the differences between science and Christianity; the former that has no urge or reason to believe in divine Reality, and the latter that envisions its God as a heavenly form at best, unawares or shying away from its infinite nature.

Here is where Advaita can be applied for reaping the highest results pertaining to the growth of the human mind. In the Advaitic perspective, the concern is not relegated to a status of higher and lower. It is more pertinent in terms of what stage or station each individual has arrived at. However, the great benefit of perceiving God in its formless aspect is that it destroys all concerns and quandaries in the human mind, not just the ones pertaining to relativity. Put in more direct way, God or Reality is endowed with both form and formlessness, but being aware of only its myriad forms will not complete the philosophical picture or mature the dual mind. It is formlessness that must be experienced to satisfy these consummate ends.

This experience is called *nirvikalpa* samadhi in Vedanta; *asamprajnata* in Yoga; *svatantrya*, absolute freedom, in tantra; and *kaivalya*, a freeing isolation from nature, from all form, according to Samkhya. Whatever the name given, it puts the finishing touches on the masterwork of the sincere seeker’s spiritual life, for whereas before non-dual realization there may have been great faith and devotion, with Advaita comes full knowledge of where faith leads and what devotion loves.

To place this in a simpler context, Swami Vivekananda has stated: ‘The ignorant see the person in the non-person. The sage sees the non-person in the person. Through pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, this is the one lesson we are learning.’⁶ The crying need in this day and age, then, is to begin to bring back from our inmost memory the truth and efficacy of non-duality—the oneness of all things, the innate homogeneity of all beings. India’s Advaita Vedanta is best suited for this task. There is, simply put, no other philosophy or train of higher thought available to the world and its people that is able to bridge the gap between Brahman and Ishta Devata, and simultaneously convince humanity of the truth of the oneness of all existence, what to speak of the existence of existence itself. The way Swami Vivekananda expressed this in the early 1900s leaves no doubt as to the primary directive facing humankind at this time in its spiritual evolution: ‘On planes physical, ethical, and spiritual, an ever-broadening generalisation—leading up to a concept of Unity Eternal—is in the air; and this being so, all the movements of the time may be taken to represent, knowingly or unknowingly, the noblest philosophy of the unity of man ever had—the Advaita Vedanta’ (8.347).

The Advaita Vedanta, the highest teaching of the Vedas and Upanishads, is what is being offered to striving beings in the grip of maya today. Maya comes in the form of that all too familiar spiritually debilitating worldliness and complacency, or appears insidiously as the pervasiveness of ‘mundane religious convention’ with its pretence and posturing and lack of any real spiritual substance or solution.

There Is no such Thing as Foreign Religion

With all of this stated—being rather like an essential primer to the subject of the acceptance and

practice of Advaita by seekers of all religions—the onerous impediment of religious doubt must be encountered and done away with—the fear of anything that falls outside the pale of one’s own limited knowledge. In this regard, the statement, ‘There is no such thing as a foreign religion,’ can be of great help in this undertaking.

To delve deeper into this declaration is to gain experience in the truths of other religions. The sedulous religious seeker will discover that spiritual succour and all-round benefit is available to anyone who possesses the fearless spirit with which to venture outside conventional boundaries. Such enterprising beings, such intrepid spiritual travellers, will find, to their pleasant surprise, that all religion is indigenous to the soul, and what was palmed off on them previously by zealots and the money and power-seeking priests was either incomplete, or thoroughly untrue and, therefore, religiously unhealthy. Swami Vivekananda eschewed this mockery of true religion, both in the general Christianity he found in America at the turn of the last century and in the prevailing religious thinking of his own country as well. Therefore, he wrote: ‘On the one hand there is the conservative society, like a mass of inert matter; on the other, the restless, impatient, fire-darting reformer; the way to good lies between the two’ (5.127).

Falling into either of these inferior pathways is to be avoided, but once these deviant routes have been taken, there will come a host of negative effects, the likes of which are to be seen today in the forms of: doubt as to the existence of God; ignorance of what or who God is; confusion as to the meaning and direction of one’s life; fear of what occurs at the time of death and what happens beyond it; preoccupation with matter, materials, objects, and the brooding that attends it; a weak and deluded dalliance with pleasure-seeking that really only amounts to an

ineffective retreat from the unavoidable pains and suffering of embodied existence—all based in forgetfulness of the inseparability of God and humankind, in humans knowing that God has manifested as humans.

At this juncture there will be a great struggle to affect the re-tracing of one's former footsteps and even this will not suffice as a consummate end. The ultimate remedies are really to be found in religion; not religion of the conventional and dogmatic kind, but true religion, taught and transmitted by illumined souls to sincere seekers of Truth. And Western seekers of this Truth, having had it veiled from them for so long, must free themselves from the pride of power and secular learning, seek out these great souls from other countries, and take refuge there and be taught. Can they do this, free of the fear that they are abandoning their own religion? Certainly, especially if their own religion has failed them—failed to be a true religion over the long efflux of time.

It is not that India did not suffer the rise and fall of religion and its selfish manipulations by the brahmana priests. It did so repeatedly and over vaster sweeps of time than the West. As Swami Vivekananda noted: 'It is in the books written by priests that madness like that of caste is to be found, and not in books revealed by God. Let the priests enjoy the fruits of their ancestor's achievements, while I follow the word of God, for my good lies there' (6.394).

Swami Vivekananda placed the blame for the fall of religion on humankind, and with humans' inability to rightly comprehend religion and to put its timeless tenets into well-



guided practice. The blame is never with religion, not true religion, which is the Truth, which is eternal. Along these important lines of distinction he wrote:

The modern reformers saw no way to reform but by first crushing out the religion of India. They tried and they failed. Why? Because few of them ever studied their own religion, and not one ever underwent the training necessary to understand the Mother of all Religions. I claim that no destruction of religion is necessary to improve the Hindu society, and that this state of society exists not on account of religion, but because that religion has not been applied to society as it should have been. This I am ready to prove from our old books, every word of it (5.47).

The Dynamics of Allegiance to True Religion

By noting India's careful scrutiny of the jivatman and admiring the deep and loving fealty by which her seers have regarded and protected non-dual Truth over the ages, it is easy, even natural, for any sincere seeker of any religion to pay homage to Vedanta, in whatever way and to whatever extent they can manage. The promise of Vedanta is that by following its tenets—dualistic, qualified, and non-dualistic, according to the stage of practice and achievement the aspirant is presently occupying—a Muslim will become a better Muslim, a Jew a better Jew, and a Christian a better Christian. One of the winning facets of Vedanta is that it does not require that a soul born to another religion convert to Hinduism. Making converts, at least in the way it is usually understood, is one of the abiding ills of conventional religion, for it follows the bigoted 'my watch gives the only correct time' method, which causes more harm than good. Put another way, the one-size-fits-all theory only tortures many feet.

As for Vedanta, it is not a religion like Hinduism with its complex and often confusing polytheistic side, so one cannot really convert to it. Vedanta is a faithful presenter of true religion, a philosophical way of life, and an eternal dharma.

Being a Vedantist is about following and adhering to the unique path of universality wherein all religions are seen and known as diverse pathways leading to one ultimate summit, each one appealing to a plethora of souls that are psychologically earmarked in their present embodiment for that particular religious destiny.

In other words, each soul's religion of choice is neither a partiality nor a paradox; it is a pre-conscious preference; there is immediate and predestined purpose to it. But that purpose gets frustrated if narrowness of view gets imposed upon it. Or, put another way, when access to interreligious communion and philosophical freedom is disallowed, true religion fades to the background to await rediscovery in a later age. Therefore, these bars to progress on the spiritual level are the first impediments the sincere seeker must reject, and once gone, the free air of religious interactions can be enjoyed. If explored deeply, this fresh approach will lead to what the seers have called the 'open space beyond religion'. This is a rare access, only attained by the few.

Though the heights of non-duality are inaccessible to most souls at the outset, the greatest of sages and seers agree that all beings ought to hear the non-dual axioms early on in spiritual life and practice. Swami Vivekananda was one of those, wanting and willing to spread them door to door, even personally. At the turn of the nineteenth century this is precisely what he was doing, in flats, lofts, and parlours—from the East coast to the West—what to speak of the entire world. The Great Master, Sri Ramakrishna, had himself instructed Swami Vivekananda to hear the non-dual Truth initially and keep it 'tied in his wearing cloth' taking it out whenever he needed it. Due to its rare and superlative nature, it is not to be bantered about or given to just anyone. Preparedness is the key prior to its practice—as subtle as its practice is.

Advaita, though highly sensitive and hard to hold, is not difficult to comprehend upon first exposure. But due to the many overlays in the mind, placed there by short-sighted parenting, overall apathy of society, and the deceitful obscuration of fundamentalist religion, this most precious Truth, ringing so clearly when the call is intuitively heard, followed by access to and instructions from an illumined teacher, simply departs surface awareness and sinks into the deepest recesses of the mind as daily life proceeds. Therefore, constant concentration is enjoined. Following are a few of the simple but profound maxims of Advaita Vedanta, which will give the sedulous seeker an idea of what reality and enlightenment are. These are to be held in awareness over the passage of increments of time, a mental effort that in itself constitutes a type of Advaitic sadhana.

The following list gives declarations and guides, interchangeably, to ensure that the soul will always remain in recognition of its non-dual essence, despite, and due to, the vicissitudes of everyday life. Advaita, then, is practical, in that it reveals the ultimate Truth and then moves to expose the impediments to realizing it as well:

- Brahman alone is real; all else is appearance
- Brahman and jiva, or God and soul or self, are identical
- Bondage is the result of ignorance of the Self
- False identification with the non-self, nature, is the cause of bondage
- Freedom is attained when ignorance and false identification disappear
- Disappearance of ignorance entails disappearance of the non-self
- Freedom is the essence of the Self; loss of freedom is a case of forgetfulness
- The Self is always free; freedom is never attained but it is realized
- The impediment to freedom is preoccupation with the objective world
- The solution for obsession with relativity is cultivation of detachment
- So long as mind perceives a separate self, there will be fear and attachment
- Freedom consists of seeing nothing but the Self
- The Self is Brahman and is not to be confused with the body/mind complex
- The ego is consciousness but limited and distorted by the ignorant mind.

The next list presents attributes of the attributeless Brahman. What is meant by this seeming contradiction is that these particular qualities and attributes do not just attend upon formless Reality, but rather cite its very nature—like the analogy of ornaments on a Christmas tree, as contrasted to the green colour of the tree itself. The former are add-ons, while the latter is the tree's essential property: (i) unbounded Freedom; (ii) infinite Power; (iii) perfect Omniscience; (iv) integral Knowledge; (v) eternal Contentment/Peace; and (vi) perpetual Existence.

In other words, Brahman is *ajah*, unborn; *stanuh*, unmoving; *nityah*, absolute; *puranah*, oldest/original; *achala*, immovable; *sanatanah*, eternal; *avikaryah*, unchangeable; *shashvatah*, immutable; *avyakta*, unmanifest; *avyayam*, inexhaustible; *avinashi*, indestructible; *sarvagatah*, all-pervading; *achintyah*, incomprehensible.

Though incomprehensible, Advaita does not mean that the aspirant is to give up trying to know Brahman. The implication is that the ordinary or untrained mind can never know Brahman. But as we see by the comprehensive lists given above, the jiva is one with Brahman. Contemplating this fact, the seeker soon understands that knowledge, the knower, the act of knowing,

and the thing to be known—all dissolve into their own divine nature. The mind, once purified, helps in this task.

What has been transmitted above in the form of mere lists forms a huge part of the practice of Advaita. New sadhakas approaching Vedanta from other religious climes must hear this Truth, first of all. The power of words is undeniable and indispensable for the realization of the Self by the jiva, embodied being, temporarily locked in maya's dubious embrace. What starts out as a seeming exercise for the intellect gradually turns into a bubbling fountain of bliss, which also keeps at bay all the vagaries of life and mind. If there is any detectable practice for a non-dualist, it is this—the constant contemplation of the nature of formless Reality, which, if one looks around at people and society today, is sorely missing.

This shocking absence of awareness of one's own birthless, deathless, timeless, causeless Self—called by whatever name one might assign to it—is the reason that a once innate spirituality has all but disappeared from the world, and from human consciousness. The result, at least in this age, is materialism or worldliness, a deluded and inexcusable dependence upon insentient nature by the sentient self. The result of this is suffering, which does not abate after death, but recurs for the jiva that incarnates again and again due to the loss of remembrance of their true identity.

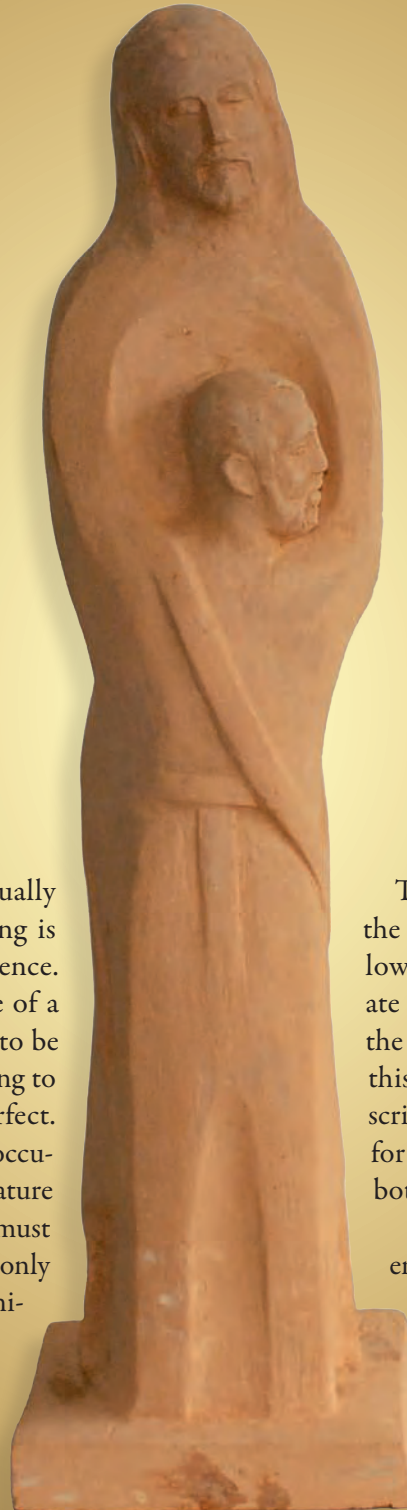
This act of reincarnation, based upon forgetfulness of the jiva and the mounting unresolved karma that occurs, brings in the efficacy of the personal God, a divine station that the adherents of most religions know about and rely upon, considering it the ultimate resort in life. Advaita allows for this presence, but is quick to point out that 'everything is soluble into Brahman', even the personal God. The famous analogy of icebergs forming on the breast of the infinite ocean

and melting back into it due to the heat of the sun applies here. In other words, an iceberg is only solidified water, so the personal God is only God with qualities, *saguna*. Brahman is like the ocean, free of all qualities, *nirguna*. Further, the sun represents pure Intelligence, whose healing and illuminating rays both dissolves all forms and takes away all attending ills that accompany form. A larger picture of God with form will help the seeker of non-duality immensely, since much misunderstanding has collected over the ages, and in all religions, around the personal God and its many aspects—especially in its role as saviour.

The Puzzle Piece of the Personal God

Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, Moses, and other forms of highest Consciousness are beings that manifested on earth as direct emanations of non-dual awareness through their own shining intelligence. They are knowers of the formless Reality first and foremost, and thereafter sacrificers of the highest order due to their assumption of name and form for the benefit of jivas that are embodied in ignorance. Thus, their primary reason for projecting a form on earth is not due to any desire, or for the working out of karma, or for sportive play, or out of compassion for suffering; these are secondary purposes at best. Primarily, they come to both reveal and demonstrate the inherently perfect nature of the jiva. This is beyond being 'saved', even beyond being 'liberated'. They epitomize the eternally liberated nature of the Self, whether it be embodied or disembodied.

As the axioms in our previous list state, the body, mind, and senses are not the Self. The non-dualist has already accepted the axioms pertinent to Reality, applying them to relativity as well, and must not reject them in the face of trials, challenges, and the various acts of apparent



transformation that are continually going on in the world. Suffering is to be accepted as a fact of existence. The appearance and acceptance of a saviour figure in our lives is not to be used for the purpose of attempting to perfect what is inherently imperfect. The mechanisms consciousness occupies are flawed by nature, and nature is flawed by nature as well. One must not serve God and Mammon, for only God exists. Thus, the saviour manifests to wean one off the world and its mutable and transitory offerings, not to perform miracles so that one can enjoy it.

To recognize the purpose of the saviour, or avatara, and to follow his teachings to the ultimate end, called enlightenment, is the crying need. Few accomplish this; many fall away from the prescribed spiritual praxis necessary for enlightenment; and most fail both directives.

When the formless Brahman emanates as a form, and given—due to our list of non-dual axioms—that it always remains formless, it does so by way of assumption, never by identification.

Conscious emanation, rather than ignorant projection, is utilized and the divine form lives, acts, breathes, moves, and works as if playing a part in someone else's dream, for that is precisely what is going on. Life, along with the apparent movements of birth and death, are all known by the avatara as collective mental dreaming, much of it based in ignorance of the Self. Shining like a million suns, the conscious avataras appear by way of certain divine laws. These laws are also the six attributes of Bhagavan: (i) unlimited abundance, (ii) magnificent glory, (iii) irresistible strength, (iv) penetrating wisdom, (v) awesome splendour, and (vi) natural renunciation.

The last of these attributes, *tyaga*, renunciation, is possibly the most important one for

the qualified aspirant seeking non-dual realization. If one studies the lives of the various avataras of different religions, the giving up of the world shows through in all of them, if not, at least, a strong detachment from it. This detachment is not only effected at the obvious and crucial level of illusions and delusions but also with regard to the very appearance of name and form; the first is a mental renunciation and the latter is a physical one. Seeing through all of projection by the mind, they perceive simultaneously that the world is 'shifting sand' as well as being perpetrated by the mind at cosmic, collective, and individual levels of awareness. In this way, their renunciation is what is called mature *tyaga* as contrasted to those ascetics who renounce the world, but fail to see

'FIRST REALISATION OF THE TOUCH'.
BY ANIT GHOSH - TERRACOTTA



it as a manifestation of the mental processes in maya. If the world were wholly unreal, it would not need renouncing. This difference marks the avatara as the perfect being to help humanity at all levels of awareness, from the striving practitioner to the suffering soul and even down to the miserable wretch.

In the realized renunciation of avatara, all of nature, of humanity, even of maya, transforms into Brahman with attributes. Since they know Brahman beyond attributes, they are the singular, archetypical soul that truly sees whereas others see only partly at best. The avatara therefore perceive everything as divine Reality in its assumed and presumed modes. Another list will illustrate this well. God's powers at this level of awareness are the following: (i) living beings, (ii) universe, (iii) mind, (iv) intelligence, (v) love, and (vi) wisdom.

Under the press of the ordinary mind, what to speak of the distracted, deluded, or fragmented mind, the six powers noted above are nothing extraordinary. This power of powers is the direct result of non-dual realization, of knowing God to be formless. To quote Swami Vivekananda on this subject:

Ishvara is the sum total of individuals; yet He Himself also is an individual in the same way as the human body is a unit, of which each cell is an individual. Samashti or the Collective is God. Vyashti or the component is the soul of Jiva. The existence of Ishvara, therefore, depends on that of Jiva, as the body on the cell, and vice versa. Jiva, and Ishvara are co-existent beings. As long as the one exists, the other also must. Again, since in all the higher spheres, except on our earth, the amount of good is vastly in excess of the amount of bad, the sum total or Ishvara may be said to be All-good, Almighty, and Omniscient. These are obvious qualities, and need no argument to prove, from the very fact of totality (8,385).⁸

These three principles, Brahman, Ishvara, and jiva—formless Reality, God with form, and the embodied soul—are all eternal and interconnected. Ultimately, they are beyond mere connections and are nothing other than identical with one another, depending upon what level of consciousness one is apprehending.

But dualistic religion does not focus here and fundamentalism denies such grand declarations. For the good of the people and for the continuing existence of their spiritual life and practice, Advaita is to be accepted and scrutinized. For without Brahman, Ishvara and humankind cease to appear, while even if humanity and its personal God were to dissolve, Brahman would still exist. As our non-dual axioms tell us, Brahman is perpetual existence—unborn, eternal, indestructible, and all-pervading. As Swami Vivekananda has stated: 'Brahman is beyond both of these [Ishvara and the world], and is not a state. It is the only unit not composed of many units. It is the principle which runs through all, from a cell to God, and without which nothing can exist. Whatever is real is that principle, or Brahman. When I think "I am Brahman", then I alone exist. It is so also when *you* so think, and so on. Each is the whole of that principle' (ibid.).

The abundant inner wealth of Advaita, with all its wisdom and subtle power, is waiting with the open arms of congeniality and the spirit of concrescence for all enterprising seekers of Truth. It will achieve healthy amelioration leading to enlightenment where dualistic and fundamentalist perspectives will only err again and again. Even now, after so much wisdom has been communicated, all very satisfying, and very convincing, if the human mind still clings to its doubts and fears, then these final words of solace can be added.

India has come many steps towards the West in her willingness to share all that many millennia

of study, spiritual sadhana, devotion, and meditation have revealed. Not only has India seen all that the world has to dole out—painful, pleasurable, and transcendent—it has also practised what it has preached and accepted, fully and without reserve, the teachers and teachings of other countries and nations. It has even accepted their highest ideals of the personal God, venerating Jesus, Mohammed, and the ideals of the Sikhs, Jains, and others. As Swami Vivekananda wrote: ‘I preach nothing against the great One of Galilee. I only ask the Christians to take in the great Ones of Ind along with the Lord Jesus’ (5.13).

The time is upon us to partake abundantly of India’s special storehouse of transcendent wisdom called Advaita. By championing it, studying it, and practising its eternal principles and axioms,

the mistakes and shortcomings of conventional religious pathways around the world will be erased from the mind, and the atmosphere of harmony, unity, and indivisibility will reign supreme in the human heart and mind. This is the promise of true and authentic spirituality: ‘The noblest philosophy of the unity of man ever had—the Advaita Vedanta.’



References

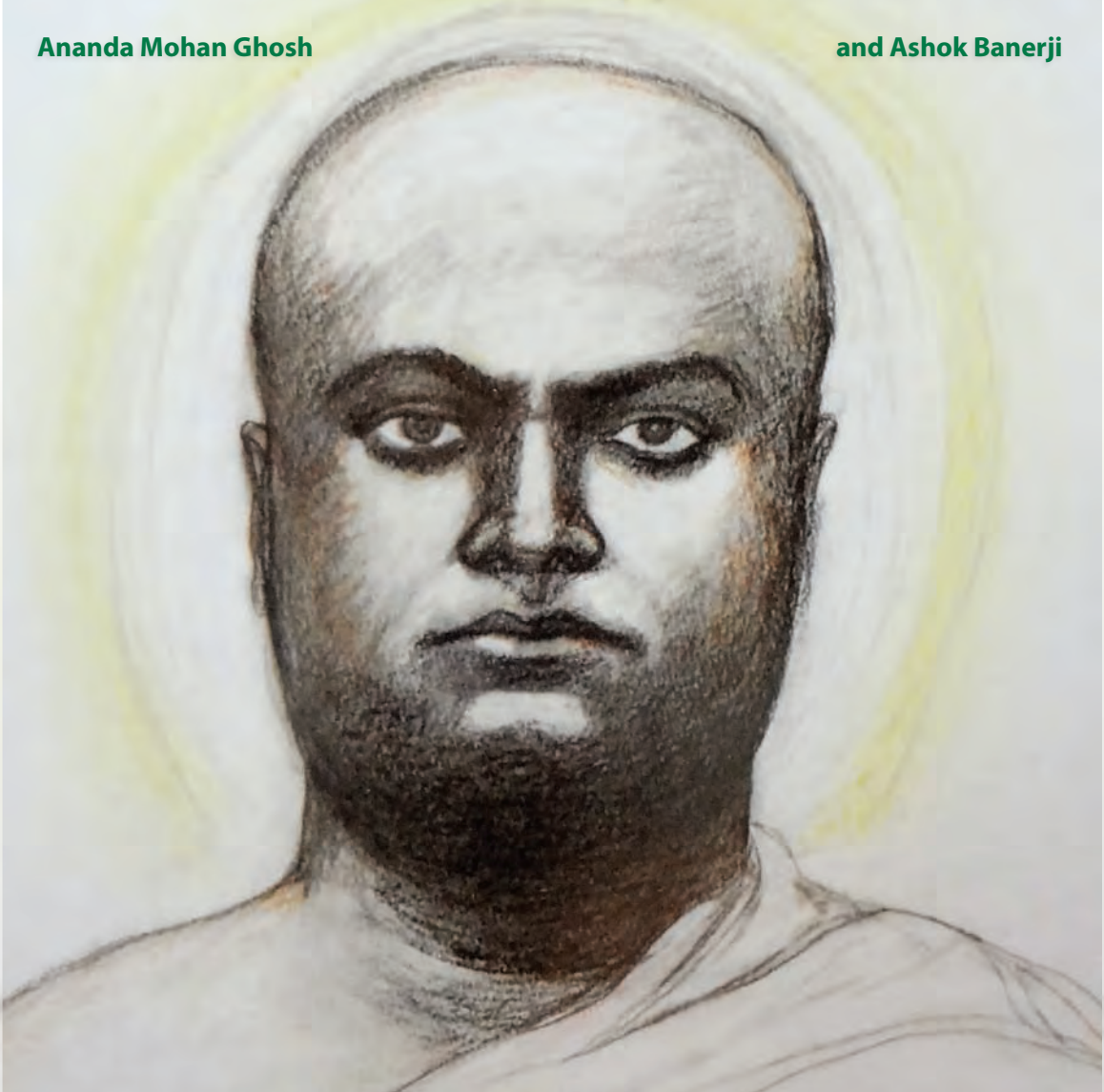
1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 8.346.
2. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 6.2.1.
3. *Complete Works*, 5.104.
4. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 6.2.3.
5. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.6.1.
6. *Complete Works*, 8.429.



Vivekananda's Ideas Applied to Science

Ananda Mohan Ghosh

and Ashok Banerji



SRI RAMAKRISHNA ONCE SAID to Dr Mahendralal Sarkar: 'Everything that you see here [meaning his own advent] is on account of him [Swami Vivekananda].'¹ The young Narendranath was being groomed by his guru to become a preacher and a practical pathfinder of Vedanta philosophy. Swami Vivekananda later presented Vedanta in a modern perspective so that scientific minded people would appreciate it. By travelling all over India and the world, Swamiji realized science and engineering could partially remove the misery of the poor but not the beast in the human heart. Latent spirituality was to be aroused through 'man-making education'. In this article we will review Swamiji's ideas relevant to the field of science and engineering and expound upon the concept of *spiritual engineering*.

Swamiji was a spiritual leader who had modern university education and traditional spiritual training. He collected data by keenly observing the world during his extensive travels in India and the world, besides he deepened his spiritual experiences he had during his discipleship. His teachings, designed to develop a national consciousness based on spirituality, resonated with the poor and the rich, the learned and ignorant, and the high and the low. Like a scientifically established law of nature, his teachings remain valid today, 150 years after his birth. A scientist discovers a truth, an engineer makes it practical, and a technician makes it applicable to daily life. In the same way Sri Ramakrishna rediscovered the ancient truth of the rishis, Swamiji made it practical, and *we* are supposed to apply it for our liberation and the welfare of the world.

The Process

Scientists discover truths with the help of instruments, sense organs, and experimentation. But the first flash of any discovery appears in the mind. That is why Swamiji said: 'It is only when the mind is very calm and collected that the whole of its energy is spent in doing good work.'² Mind is primary, that is why ancient Indian sages developed the science of the mind as a means for achieving any desired result. This science of the mind is an integral component of spirituality in general and yoga in particular.

Scientists need a powerful toolbox, consisting of observation and analysis, to detect and identify truths hidden behind the forest of data and facts. According to Indian psychology, every human being has an *antahkarana*, internal instrument, which is comprised of mind, intelligence, memory, and ego. These functions are often erratic due to internal causes, such as karma and desires, and external causes, such as the interaction of the sense organs with the

world. Yoga practices remove the internal obstructions and protect against harmful external influences. This is why Swamiji says if he had to redo his education, he would first learn how to control and concentrate the mind, then collect facts at will.

People generally believe science and philosophy are antagonistic. Swamiji tried to remove this erroneous notion by comprehending the truths in them. He said that science is the search for truth in the external world, and religion is the search for truth in the internal world. Pushed to the extreme, they both meet as there is one truth that is expressing itself internally and externally. Genuine happiness requires a proper balance between the two. This is where modern societies fail, as science and engineering receives the lion's share of attention, disrupting the ideal equilibrium. This creates an internal vacuum, which results in an incessant search in the external world for fulfilment of one's insatiable desires. Science and engineering is often blamed for the disharmony between the internal and external, however, this blame is misplaced. The actual cause is the uncontrolled mind. Science and engineering bring order not chaos, and this misunderstanding is why Swamiji wanted to strike a balance between spirituality and science.

To understand Swamiji's original thoughts, we shall look at some of his ideas that over the years have been vindicated by science.

Creation • Scientists have recently theorized the universe as we know it was created 13.7 billion years ago with the Big Bang. This threatened many religious theories about creation but Vedanta stood its ground. As Swamiji says:

We know that in our books a clear distinction is made between two sets of truths. The one set is that which abides for ever, being built upon the nature of man, the nature of the soul, the soul's relation to God, the nature of God, perfection,

and so on; there are also the principles of cosmology, of the infinitude of creation, or more correctly speaking—projection, the wonderful law of cyclical procession, and so on—these are the eternal principles founded upon the universal laws in nature. (3.111).

There is also the idea in modern science of a cyclic creation and that too Swamiji dwells upon: 'At the end of a cycle, everything becomes finer and finer and is resolved back into the primal state from which it sprang, and there it remains for a time quiescent, ready to spring forth again. That is Srishti, projection' (3.399).

Scientists are striving to unify all the known forces of the universe and have succeeded to a great extent. Only gravity, till today, is not being amenable to this unification. In Vedanta, all forces mean internal as well as external, which science is just beginning to realize. Science, Swamiji says:

Has just discovered that what it calls heat, magnetism, electricity, and so forth, are all convertible into one unit force, and as such, it expresses all these by one name, whatever you may choose to call it. But this has been done even in the Samhita [Vedas]; old and ancient as it is, in it we meet with this very idea of force I was referring to. All the forces, whether you call them gravitation, or attraction, or repulsion, whether expressing themselves as heat, or electricity, or magnetism, are nothing but the variations of that unit energy. Whether they express themselves as thought, reflected from Antahkarana, the inner organs of man, or as action from an external organ, the unit from which they spring is what is called Prana. Again, what is Prana? Prana is Spandana or vibration (ibid.).

Swamiji also speaks of '*desha-kala-nimitta*; time, space, and causation', which according to Indian philosophy shows a correspondence to the modern ideas of time and space.

Evolution and Involution • During Swamiji's time, Darwin's theory of evolution was

controversial as it countered the official church doctrine; however, the theory, long propounded in India, is now well established and universally accepted. The last one hundred years of scientific progress makes Swamiji's statements appear prophetic: 'Every evolution presupposes an involution. The modern scientific man will tell you that you can only get the amount of energy out of a machine which you have previously put into it (3.75)' Through this brief statement Swamiji endorses the non-linear nature of time, and law of conservation of energy, and he applies it creatively to the laws of evolution, saying that is presupposes involution. And not only that he pushes it to the spiritual nature of the human by saying; 'If man is an evolution of a mollusc, then the perfect man—the Buddha-man, the Christ-man—was involved in the mollusc. If it is not so, whence come these gigantic personalities?' (ibid.).

Swamiji clarified his views on evolution by saying: 'Do you not hear what your modern scientific men say? What is the cause of evolution? Desire. The animal wants to do something, but does not find the environment favourable, and therefore develops a new body. Who develops it? The animal itself, its will. You have developed from the lowest amoeba. Continue to exercise your will and it will take you higher still' (3.356). Swamiji is therefore highlighting the power of sadhana to expedite one's personal evolution. Although nature has an intrinsic quality that aids collective growth of the species, Swamiji asks us to put our will power to use. Similar remarks were made by Julian Huxley in *Evolution after Darwin*: 'In the light of our present knowledge, man's most comprehensive aim is seen not as mere survival, not as numerical increase, not as increased complexity of organization or increased control over its environment, but as greater fulfilment—the fuller realization of more possibilities by the human species collectively

and more of its component members individually.³ This is exactly what we need to apply in our daily life. Scientific knowledge alone cannot do much unless a person translates it into actions through spirituality.

Swami Ranganathananda says: 'If the whole universe is the product of a self-evolving cause, as Vedanta and modern science uphold, then that cause must be present in all its evolutionary products, which then can have no reality apart from it. This corollary follows whether that cause is viewed as an intelligent principle as in Vedanta or as a non-intelligent principle as in science.'⁴ He further adds: 'Brahman is in man, but if we are to realize Him, we have to seek Him not in man's obvious sensate experiences, but in the depth of his *buddhi*, intelligence, which is the highest product of evolution, being the most luminous' (375).

In his lecture 'The Cosmos' Swamiji said:

At the beginning, the intelligence becomes involved; and in the end, that intelligence gets evolved. The sum total of the intelligence displayed in the universe must, therefore, be the involved universal intelligence unfolding itself. This universal intelligence is what we call God. Call it by any other name, it is absolutely certain that in the beginning there is that Infinite cosmic intelligence. This cosmic intelligence gets involved, and it manifests, evolves itself, until it becomes the perfect man, the 'Christ-man', the 'Buddha-man'. Then it goes back to its own source. That is why all the scriptures say, 'In Him we live and move and have our being.' That is why all the scriptures preach that we come from God and go back to God.⁵

Nature of External Reality • The world we see is a gross manifestation of reality perceived and interpreted by our brains. The classical world of physics, and our 'realist' views, received a rude shock with the discoveries of the

laws of quantum mechanics and its uncertainty principle. The quantum world of the sub-atom speaks of a realm akin to what Vedantins call *maya*. Swamiji in his brilliant *Jnana Yoga* lectures brought a modern interpretation to this ancient theory. 'The Maya of the Vedanta, in its last developed form, is neither Idealism nor Realism, nor is it a theory. It is a simple statement of facts—what we are and what we see around us' (2.89). 'There is neither how nor why in fact; we only know that it is and that we cannot help it. Even to grasp it, to draw an exact image of it in our own mind, is beyond our power' (2.94).

Erwin Schrödinger is one of the pioneers of this line of science, which is totally astounding to ordinary comprehension and has found practical application in many modern technologies by engineers. Walter Moore, Schrödinger's biographer, writes: 'The unity and continuity of Vedanta are reflected in the unity and continuity of wave mechanics. In 1925, the worldview of physics was a model of a great machine composed of separable interacting material particles. During the next few years, Schrodinger and Heisenberg and their followers proposed a universe based on superimposed inseparable waves of probability amplitudes. This new view would be entirely consistent with the Vedantic concept of All in One.'⁶

Influence of Spirituality in Human life

If we compare a human being with a computer, the body is its hardware and its mind is its software. The software is further divided into system and application software. Nature provides the necessary system software to every human being; application software needs to be acquired by each individual through education, training, and development. Just as computers are affected with malware and computer viruses, the mind also is affected with variables that disturb the



entire system. To optimize computer performance, viruses must be removed. Likewise, to optimize human performance, mental impurities must be removed. The best way to do that is through the practice of yoga.

Just as matter and mind is said to form a continuum, so disciplines of science and religion could be said to form a continuum of human-kind's exploration of the same reality. Swamiji's effort was to show that the external and internal world are not separate, that the gross melts into the fine and physics into metaphysics.

There has been a growing discontent with old ideas of religion, as they are mostly rooted in ancient mythology, making them difficult to

comprehend in today's modern society. Science has exerted a powerful influence on the human mind globally, while religion has languished behind with its archaic world views and rules. Swamiji said: 'When we want to study religion, we should apply this scientific process. The same principle also holds good here' (2.329). He showed that any phenomenon has to be explained by the nature of the thing itself, as science does, and not depend on external explanations like the old interpretations of religions do. That is why he says:

Just as there are millions of people who are ready to believe in a Personal Creator, there have also been thousands of the brightest minds

in this world who felt that such ideas were not sufficient for them, and wanted something higher, and wherever religion was not broad enough to include all these minds, the result was that the brightest minds in society were always outside of religion; and never was this so marked as at the present time, especially in Europe. To include these minds, therefore, religion must become broad enough. Everything it claims must be judged from the standpoint of reason (3.334-5).

‘Science without religion is lame; Religion without science is blind,’ said Albert Einstein.⁷ Dependence on both science and religion is required for sustainable growth of a modern society. Science augments physical resources; religion augments peace and harmony in human relationships. No person can stand on a single leg for a long time; similarly no society can progress as a whole without standing on both legs of science and religion. Hence the modern society that prefers to pay more attention to science and technology, while neglecting spirituality, is prone to sufferings. Many social problems can be solved by a revival of spirituality in a new form given by Swamiji. He said: ‘Modern science has really made the foundations of religion strong. That the whole universe is one, is scientifically demonstrable. What the metaphysicians call “being”, the physicist calls “matter”, but there is no real fight between the two, for both are one.’⁸

During Swamiji’s time India was underdeveloped, lacking technology and industry. He therefore advised Indians to take the help of Western science to eradicate

poverty and unemployment and focus on education, health, and sanitation. He knew that until the population was educated and physically healthy, religion was a far cry. One of the reasons he went to the West was to recruit experts in vocational training and get the financial resources to start pragmatic institutions in India.

His ideas of education were also far ahead of his time. Today we have mass education, distance education, and adult education, which are becoming increasingly available to anybody wanting to pursue their own development, regardless



of social or economic position. It took more than 100 years to start moving in the direction he originally identified.

Throughout his life of teaching practical Vedanta, Swamiji warned of the dangers of too much dependence on science and technology and insisted on preserving India's spiritual heritage. He said: 'Material science can only give worldly prosperity, whilst spiritual science is for eternal life. If there be no eternal life, still the enjoyment of spiritual thoughts as ideals is keener and makes a man happier, whilst the foolery of materialism leads to competition and undue ambition and ultimate death, individual and national' (6.391). Today we need to implement spirituality in our daily activities. With the manifestation of the Atman one can master anything regardless of the field of endeavour. Therefore, integrating spirituality in both personal and professional life enhances one's role as a scientist or engineer. Just as iron can be made rust free by adding alloying material, similarly a person can be made selfless by adding spirituality.

Studies on Consciousness

Swamiji made a very thought-provoking comment about gross matter: 'Take anything before you, the most material thing—take any one of these most materialistic sciences, such as chemistry or physics, astronomy or biology—study it, push the study forward and forward, and the gross forms will begin to melt and become finer and finer, until they come to a point where you are bound to make a tremendous leap from these material things into the immaterial' (4.204). Science tells us that gross matter follows the laws of Newtonian physics, while subtle matter follows the laws of quantum mechanics. All physical objects have mass and can be decomposed into molecules, atoms, and further subtle particles.

Physicists recently discovered new subatomic packets of energy known as Higgs-Bosons and confirmed the process in which they are converted to matter. This scientific discovery further points to the solidarity of the universe.

The standard model of physics is verified and science, as a whole, is moving a step forwards towards realization of the nature of matter. But, astoundingly, till date scientists have only been able to explore approximately four per cent of the observable universe; the remaining ninety-six per cent of the universe remains unexplored. The unexplored universe contains dark matter and dark energy.

In 1964 John Stewart Bell proposed a new theorem predicting the existence of an unbroken wholeness combining objective and subjective worlds holistically.⁹ Subsequently, Physicist Alain Aspect experimentally observed that two photons emerging out from the same source, but moving in two opposite directions, instantly communicate with each other irrespective of the distance they travelled.¹⁰ Henry Stapp, with the support of Alain Aspect's experiment, concluded that things outside space and time affect things inside space and time.¹¹ In 1897 Swamiji said: 'One atom in this universe cannot move without dragging the whole world along with it.'¹² Such dragging force may arise out of some unbroken wholeness not clearly known to conventional scientists. The theorem of unbroken wholeness was experimentally verified by David Bohm and reported in his book published in 1980, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*.¹³ Gradually, scientists started believing that over and above physical forces, consciousness is acting on everything that exists either as physical or as a mental entity. This concept fully conforms to Vedantic principles.

Neurologists, mathematicians, and physicists are trying to develop a scientific model of

consciousness. Two theories that are popular today are: ‘Orch-OR Theory’ of Penrose and Hameroff;¹⁴ and, Amit Goswami’s ‘monistic ontology.’¹⁵ Briefly, the former theory assumes that consciousness arises out of quantum collapse of very fine particles like microtubules, which cause excited neurons to fire. Penrose, however, said that their theory can explain only the mathematical intelligence of human brains and nothing more. Amit Goswami’s research on ‘monistic ontology’ considers consciousness as the root cause of everything.

Swamiji’s prediction ‘science and religion will meet and shake hands’ has now come true to some extent. He says: ‘You and I must be part of the cosmic consciousness, cosmic life, cosmic mind.’¹⁶ Many people consider mind and matter to be distinct entities. However, Swamiji says mind is matter but of a finer substance. He also claims there are various levels of the mind or consciousness, such as the subconscious and unconscious, which is a now a well supported concept in the field of neuropsychology.

Scientists say that matter, as a result of millions of years of progressive evolution, has risen to become conscious of itself. Vedanta and Swamiji take the opposite view, proposing the whole universe evolved out of consciousness. Swamiji states: ‘Out of consciousness are evolved Manas or mind, the organs of the senses, and the Tanmatras (particles of sound, touch, etc.). All the fine particles are evolved from consciousness, and out of these fine particles come the gross elements which we call matter’ (2.454). Vedantists call this consciousness, in its absolute form, Brahman or Atman.

Practical Vedanta for Scientists and Engineers

Swamiji once said: ‘Truths that we may learn from religion, apart from the comforts that

we may gain from it, religion, as a science, as a study, is the greatest and healthiest exercise that the human mind can have’ (2.65–6). Our mind has the capacity to go beyond the superficial level we live in and can reach a mental state where consciousness expands. ‘Man is man so long as he is struggling to rise above nature and this nature is both internal and external’ (3.65). When this struggle is with external variables, it is called science. When it is with internal variables, it is called yoga. The popularity of yoga and meditation all over the world attests to the many positive effects on physical and mental health. Many studies indicate that meditation and yoga practices not only amplify intelligence but also help arouse finer human qualities. Swamiji taught all knowledge comes from the mind and the infinite library of the universe resides inside.

Swamiji proposes: ‘The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength. Teach men of the strength that is already within them’ (2.300). To be a spirited scientist or engineer, immense strength of mind and self-confidence is needed. At the same time, physical strength is not to be undermined. Swamiji advises: ‘If matter is powerful, thought is omnipotent. Bring this thought to bear upon your life, fill yourselves with the thought of your almightiness, your majesty, and your glory’ (3.302). ‘Where is the scientific man today who fears to acknowledge the truth of this oneness of the universe?’ (3.303).

Science teaches us the laws of conservation of mass and energy. Swamiji added one more conservation law related to human thoughts and deeds. He said:

Every thought that we think, every deed that we do, after a certain time becomes fine, goes into seed form, so to speak, and lives in the fine body in a potential form, and after a time

it emerges again and bears its results. These results condition the life of man. Thus he moulds his own life. Man is not bound by any other laws excepting those which he makes for himself. Our thoughts, our words and deeds are the threads of the net which we throw round ourselves, for good or for evil. Once we set in motion a certain power, we have to take the full consequences of it. This is the law of Karma (2.348).


Three things are essential in human life: full manifestation of head, heart, and hand. Scientists and engineers receive sufficient education and training for the development of their heads but not heart and hand. Little attention is paid for purification of hearts, wrongly assuming

that intelligence and reasoning are sufficient for solving all problems of human life. Secondly, the practical application of one's knowledge is woefully inadequate among the professional classes. Every impure heart becomes a source of problems in society. Apprehending this situation, Swamiji suggested 'man-making education' for all, but we are now eager to have only 'money-making education'. Scientists and engineers are expected to harness natural resources to meet all physical needs of the common people without showing any bias to any particular section of people. But in reality, we find many discrepancies. The main reason behind all these disorders is lack of ethics, human values, and spirituality.



Rapid development in science and technology is making an impact on almost every sphere of life. Biological scientists are developing tools and methods to alter genetic codes of life embedded in DNA and RNA. Engineers are looking at bionics, robotics, and space travel beyond our solar system. However, alongside such fascinating developments lie potential dangers for the future, if such technologies are used intentionally or inadvertently by misguided persons for misguided purposes. Examples of such dangers include engineered viruses and contaminations with destructive powers possibly greater than atomic bombs.

Scientists and engineers are becoming increasingly concerned with environmental degradation and pollution. They are trying to save nature by inventing green technologies and avoiding energy wastage. They should not ignore the root of all contamination, mental pollution. Internal purification can be attained by combining science with spirituality and implementing Swamiji's ideas in practical life.

We must be able to reverse-engineer our minds, according to Swami Vivekananda's teachings, and go back to our source and find consciousness pervading the whole universe. Only then we can be called applying the dynamics of *spiritual engineering*. 

References

1. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 1.151.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989, 9, 1997), 2.293.
3. Julian Huxley, *The Evolution of Life: Its Origin, History, and Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960), 1.20.
4. Swami Ranganathananda, *The Message of the Upanishads* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2007), 472.
5. *Complete Works*, 2.209-10.
6. Walter J Moore, *A Life of Erwin Schrödinger*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 127.
7. Albert Einstein, *Science, Philosophy and Religion: A Symposium* (New York: The Journal of Philosophy, 1941).
8. *Complete Works*, 7.50.
9. See John Stewart Bell, *Speakable and Unspeakeable in Quantum Mechanics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004).
10. 'Experimental Test of Bell's Inequalities Using Time-Varying Analyzers', *Physical Review Letters*, 49/25 (December 1982).
11. Henry P Stapp, *Mind, Matter and Quantum Mechanics* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2003).
12. *Complete Works*, 3.269.
13. David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).
14. Stuart Hameroff and Roger Penrose, 'Orchestrated Objective Reduction of Quantum Coherence in Brain Microtubules: The "Orch OR" Model for Consciousness'; <<http://www.quantumconsciousness.org/penrose-hameroff/orchOR.html>> accessed 5 November 2013.
15. Amit Goswami, *The Self-Aware Universe* (New York: Penguin, 1995).
16. *Complete Works*, 2.231.



Role of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in Human Development

Dr Anil Baran Ray and Dr Sukanya Ray

IT HAS BEEN OBSERVED in several ways that Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were the opposites of each other. Sri Ramakrishna, with his rural background and little formal education, represented traditional India. Narendra, the pre-monastic name of Swami Vivekananda, with his urban background, education, and keen intellect, was fascinated by the virile thought and achievements of the West. With doubts and scepticism born of the modern age, he was unwilling to accept the claims of religion without verification. 'He [Narendra] was critical of the traditional Hinduism for which Ramakrishna stood. He believed—or thought he believed—in reason rather than in intuition, in discrimination rather than devotion. Ramakrishna's ecstasies embarrassed him. He could not imagine himself shut up inside a temple compound, spending his days in meditation and worship. His restlessness demanded a wandering life; his reformist conscience made him eager for social service.'¹



Further, in contrast to Sri Ramakrishna's unfailing politeness, Narendra was unconventional in his social behaviour. He appeared to many people as conceited and arrogant and even cynical and bohemian. However, the contention of this article is that through the dynamics of a unique relationship, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda together evolved as an integrated soul, and this unified soul played a meaningful role in the formulation of a socio-religious approach to human development.

Background of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda

Before he met Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna had undergone a long period of sadhana. Born as Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya in a devout and spiritual brahmana family in the obscure village of Kamarpukur in the Hooghly district of West Bengal, he served as a priest in the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, built by the pious lady Rani Rasmani. Despite his little formal education, he was no ordinary priest, given only to performing puja at the temple.

Engrossed in intense sadhana for twelve years he attained the vision of the divine Mother Kali and realized the ultimate Reality through the Vedantic mode of sadhana as well. Having subsequently achieved realization through various sadhanas, as prescribed by different sects of Hinduism, he also accomplished the same through Islam and Christianity. He proved there was only one universal religion of which the conventional religions were various forms and ways of reaching the same goal; a goal that earnest seekers, irrespective of faith professed, could reach provided they gave up 'lust and gold' and sought to experience God through purity, renunciation, and unselfish love.

Two things stand out in Sri Ramakrishna's sadhana of God-realization. One is his method.

It was entirely empirical, experimental, and scientific. He pursued the paths of various religions to prove the same truth, called by various names. He also illustrated that the essence of religion is not in pontificating but directly experiencing the reality.

The second outstanding aspect of his sadhana was his concern for humanity. After he attained *nirvikalpa* samadhi, in which the sadhaka realizes his total oneness with Brahman, he brought his mind down to dwell in the world to serve, love, and enlighten humankind.

As Sri Ramakrishna's mission was to give others the benefits of his spiritual realization, he was most eager to seek out the earnest souls who would become his disciples. To quote him:

There was no limit to the yearning I had then. In the day-time I managed somehow to control it. The ordinary talk of the worldly-minded was galling to me, and I would look wistfully to the day when my beloved, all-renouncing spiritual companions would come. I hoped to find solace by telling them about my realizations, and so unburdening my mind. Every little incident would make me think of them. I used to arrange in my mind what I should say to one, give to another, and so on. But when the day came to a close, I could not curb my feelings. Another day had gone by and they had not come! When during the evening service the temple precincts rang with the sound of bells and conchs, I would climb to the roof of the building in the garden, and writhing in anguish of heart, cry at the top of my voice, 'Come, my boys! Oh, where are you all? I cannot bear to live without you!'²

Before he met his guru, Swami Vivekananda, too, had gone through a period of intense spiritual longing. Born as Narendranath Datta in North Calcutta, he showed signs of deep spirituality even as a child. All through his childhood—whether practising meditation, challenging orthodox beliefs, saving a boy from under the

hoofs of galloping horses, or nursing an injured sailor—Narendra's spontaneous inclination towards God and his disposition towards serving fellow human beings was clearly evident.

The boy learned stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata at the knees of his mother and received lessons in Sanskrit grammar from an old relative. Side by side with Sanskrit education, he studied English and Bengali literature. As Narendra grew into adolescence, he channelized some of his exuberant energy into serious academic pursuits; his favourite subjects were history and philosophy. Music was his passion and he became an adept at singing and playing the drums.

Having completed his high school education in 1879, Narendra began higher studies the following year, first at the Presidency College and a year later at the General Assembly's Institution [renamed as Scottish Church College]. Professor William Hastie, the Principal, had the following observation of Narendra's scholarship at the General Assembly's Institution: 'Narendranath is really a genius. I have travelled far and wide but I have never yet come across a lad of his talents and possibilities, even in German universities, amongst philosophical students. He is bound to make his mark in life!' (1.48).

Narendra's secular education however could not satisfy his query as to the ultimate Reality. Not finding an answer to his query in John Stuart Mill, David Hume, and Herbert Spencer, Narendra turned to the Brahmo Samaj, an important religious movement of his time. He was attracted by their liberal and progressive ideas on religious and social matters as well as offering congregational prayers in which he himself sang devotional songs. However, his enthusiasm for the Brahmo Samaj did not last long. Basically, he was looking for a spiritual experience that could give him direct proof of God. The Brahmo Samaj had no 'root in the spiritual experience of

sayings and seers' and as such 'could not satisfy the deep spiritual yearning of his soul.'³

Narendra detested many of the religious practices of Hinduism and yet he was not quite happy with the alternative that he had taken. In the midst of such a crisis, he turned to Devendranath Tagore, the leader of the Adi Brahmo Samaj, with the question whether he had experienced the vision of God. Narendra posed the same question to leaders of some other religious sects and none could give him an affirmative reply.

Unhappy and determined yet to meet one who had actually experienced God and who could help or guide him into that experience, Narendra recalled the words of Professor Hastie, who, in course of explaining the word 'trance' as used in Wordsworth's *Excursion*, observed that, 'Such an experience is the result of purity of mind and concentration on some particular object, and it is rare indeed, particularly in these days. I have seen only one person who has experienced that blessed state of mind, and he is Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. You can understand if you go there and see for yourself.'⁴ Having heard of Sri Ramakrishna and of his spiritual ecstasy from Professor Hastie, Narendra felt inspired to go to Dakshineswar to see Sri Ramakrishna. Before making the trip to Dakshineswar however, he had an opportunity to meet him in November 1881 at the house of his neighbour, Surendranath Mitra. Narendra was invited to the house of Surendranath on the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's visit to sing devotional songs in honour of Sri Ramakrishna. This was not a one-to-one meeting. It was rather a chance meeting at a gathering. Thus, except for Sri Ramakrishna expressing his appreciation of the song sung by Narendra, and inviting him to visit him at Dakshineswar, nothing much came of that meeting.

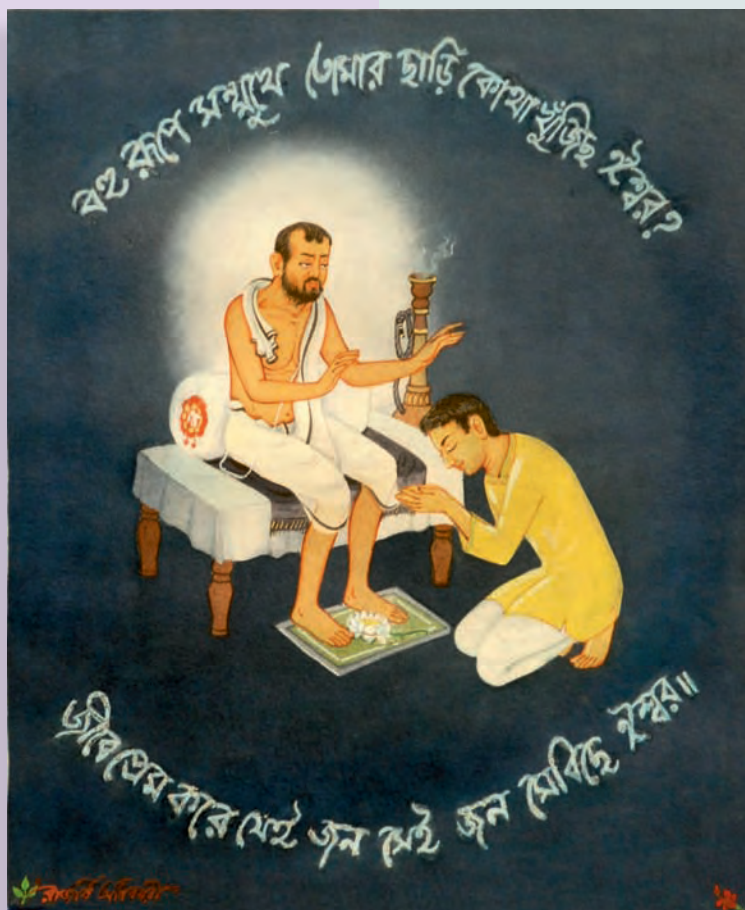
Narendra carefully weighed two visions of life that were within his means to attain. The first

concerned 'a life of ease and luxury, the life of the senses, of the enjoyment of wealth, power, name and fame, and along with all this, the love of a devoted wife and family' (1.59). The other concerned 'the life of a sannyasi, a wandering monk, having no possessions, established in the consciousness of a Divine Reality' (ibid.). Narendra resolved in favour of a life of renunciation, but his problem at that point in time was to find a guru who could lead him to experience God. His cousin Ramchandra Datta, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, came forwards at this stage and told Narendra, 'If you have a real desire to realize God, then come to the Master at Dakshineswar instead of visiting Brahmo Samaj and other places' (1.60-1). Narendra was not so sure. He thought: 'I have read the works of Spencer, Hamilton, Locke and other philosophers; what does he [Sri Ramakrishna]

know that he can teach me?'⁵ When Ramchandra insisted, Narendranath replied: 'I shall meet him, but if he fails to solve my problems, I shall pull him by the ears' (ibid.). 'His doubt was his passion. He longed to believe but could find no foundation for faith. Books could not satisfy him, or experiences got at second hand.'⁶ He expected much from people but 'soon realized that he was not getting the only thing he wanted; direct spiritual experience' (ibid.).

Early Encounters

Sri Ramakrishna was seeking out earnest souls to whom he could pour out the benefits of his spiritual realization and Narendra was seeking out the person who could confer on him the benefit of direct spiritual experience. The stage was ready for positive encounters between the two,



the first of which took place at Dakshineswar one wintry afternoon in December 1881.

With his keen observation Sri Ramakrishna could fathom the depth of Narendra's spirituality: 'There were other boys who also came here; I felt greatly drawn to some of them, but nothing like the way I was attracted to Narendra.'⁷ During this first meeting, Sri Ramakrishna addressed Narendra with folded hands and pronounced, 'Lord, I know you are that ancient sage, Nara, the Incarnation of Narayana, born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind' (ibid.).

Narendra's initial reaction was one of amazement at being described as the ancient sage Nara. He thought to himself: 'Who is this man whom I have come to see. He must be stark mad! Why, I am just the son of Vishwanath Datta, and yet he dares to address me thus!' (Ibid.).

As Narendra introspected further on the words and conduct of Sri Ramakrishna, he noted that despite his strange way of referring to him, Sri Ramakrishna's words were charged with spirituality, that his ecstatic states indicated he was a man of genuine renunciation, and the consistency between his words and his life was unmistakable. In the wake of such mental notation, Narendra asked Sri Ramakrishna a crucial question, of which he had been seeking an answer in vain for so long. "Have you seen God, sir?" "Yes, I see Him just as I see You here, only in a much intenser sense." "God can be Realized. ... one can see and talk to Him as I am seeing and talking to you. But who cares? People shed torrents of tears for their wife and children, for wealth or property, but who does so for the sake of God? If one weeps sincerely for Him, He surely manifests Himself'" (1.77).

Narendra was hugely impressed with this answer. He stated: 'For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he had seen God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense

the world. As I heard these things from his lips, I could not but believe that he was saying them not like an ordinary preacher, but from the depths of his own realizations' (ibid.).

Thus, the overall conclusion of Narendra on his first encounter with Sri Ramakrishna was that despite the way he addressed Narendra, the man was holy and reverential. Such acknowledgement, however, did not indicate Narendra's acceptance of Sri Ramakrishna as his guru.

It is with such an attitude that Narendra went to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar a second time about a month later. This time he went all alone and on foot from Calcutta to Dakshineswar. His struggle had just begun, that is, the struggle between his scepticism and his willingness to believe. He wanted to trust but only after verification. Could Sri Ramakrishna truly help him overcome his inner struggle? In his second encounter with his guru, Sri Ramakrishna placed his foot on Narendra's body, sending him into an ecstatic state.

Narendra's rationalistic mind could not explain the tremendous spiritual experience he had at his second meeting with Sri Ramakrishna and was therefore determined to be on his guard. The question arose because, in the face of 'remarkably loving treatment' he received from Sri Ramakrishna, he could not deny his request to come again to Dakshineswar.

On Narendra's third visit, which followed a few days after the second, Sri Ramakrishna took him to the adjacent garden of Jadunath Mallick. While sitting in the parlour therein, Sri Ramakrishna had a trance during which he touched Narendra, and despite all the precautions that Narendra took, he also lost all outward consciousness as soon as he was touched. On regaining his consciousness, he saw Sri Ramakrishna stroking his chest, but remembered nothing during the period he lost consciousness.



'DIVINE OBLATION', BY DILIP BANERJEE
WATERCOLOUR (WASH)

a stubborn rationalist and that he would not accept anything without proof or evidence. He appreciated Narendra's enormous self-confidence and manly spirit and therefore far from riding roughshod or imposing his ideas on him, encouraged the independence of his thought, knowing fully well that it is only through encouragement and selfless love that he will be able to develop further the regard for truth and spirituality that was innate in Narendra. He knew Narendra's struggles and intellectual questioning sprang from his desire to be convinced of the soundness of the man he now accepted as his teacher. Could he also accept him as his guru and the ideal of spiritual life? Narendra's struggle arose from his anxiety to find a satisfactory answer to this question. Sri Ramakrishna knew the source of Narendra's struggles

and he sought to bring illumination to his aspiring pupil with all the love and patience of a teacher extraordinaire.

(To be concluded)

Transformation

Once Sri Ramakrishna detected the great potential of Narendra, he set about the task of bringing the transformation of Narendra in all earnestness.

Sri Ramakrishna correctly surmised that what others thought to be Narendra's conceit and arrogance was actually his self-confidence; that his assertion of the right to act freely according to his conscience actually sprang from self-control, which was natural to him; that his supreme indifference to praise or blame sprang from the purity of his nature; and that in due time Narendra with all the attributes of his uncommon nature would blossom fully like a thousand-petalled lotus.

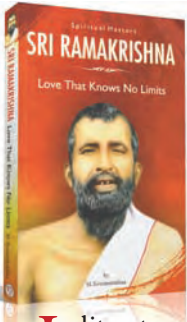
Sri Ramakrishna knew that Narendra was a struggling seeker of truth, that he was

References

1. Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), 196.
2. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 1.72.
3. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda: A Biography* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1982), 14.
4. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 1.48.
5. Sailendra Nath Dhar, *A Comprehensive Biography of Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Madras: Vivekananda Kendra, 1975), 1.79.
6. *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, 192.
7. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 1.76.

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Sri Ramakrishna: Love That Knows No Limits

M Sivaramkrishna

Indus Source Books, PO Box 6194,
Malabar Hill PO, Mumbai 400 006.
Website: www.indussource.com. ix +
281 pp. ₹ 275.

In literature, as in other fields, no one aspect or perspective is similar to another, yet there is something common about books on Sri Ramakrishna's life, so far. All evidently glorify him, while some details, especially events bordering on psychology, are given a quick brush-over. In this book Professor Sivaramkrishna uses these events as a prop to go deeper into the psychology and philosophy of the happenings that made a villager from rural Bengal the Sri Ramakrishna we know.

The book has insights not just on why things happened the way they did in Sri Ramakrishna's life, but also of the overarching philosophy behind events, which may find a translation in our lives. For example, the author says the innate curiosity in every child could be enhanced by prompt childcare, as is seen in the way his mother Chandramani Devi handled the child Gadadhar. Later, under the tutelage of Totapuri, Professor Sivaramkrishna finds an exposition of the simple ideal of education; it is a learning process for both the teacher and the student, as is propagated in the famous Upanishadic shanti mantra: *'saha navavatu, saha nau bhunaktu; may he protect us both (the teacher and the taught) together (by revealing knowledge), may he protect us both.'*

In this sense the work is like a textbook on psychology as well as philosophy on the life of a profound personality. There is also a peripheral attempt at analysing the emotions or circumstances that led to the events, drawing upon the books on mystics.

What is striking in this work is the manner in which the logical and inexplicable is juxtaposed. At one point, the author delves into his erudition to bring out points that throw light on the episodes in Sri Ramakrishna's life. Another instance has the author stating, with evident humility, that there are twists and turns of a subtle nature that are beyond the comprehension of the material or even a spiritual mind.

The impact of the vision on the child Gadadhar—the birds against the dark sky—is, in general, an indicator of the mind to find beauty in creation and to remind one of the Creator. It hints at the natural ability of Sri Ramakrishna's mind to grasp the event in all its dimensions. This made it possible for him to visualize Sri Rama's life in the forest when the Ramayana was being read, see Sri Krishna and Arjuna on the chariot as described in the Bhagavadgita, or watch the glorious Sri Chaitanya dance in joy as though in real life.

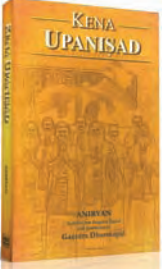
The author calls such a state 'purity of mind', something Sri Ramakrishna was born with, and with which he lay threadbare all philosophies and 'isms'. Through such a mind he touched the cornerstone of several beliefs, experiencing all the while that every facet of creation has the same core. This core is simple but one sees it as complex because one does so through an impure mind. Sri Ramakrishna's pure mind cut through this complexity. Touching upon this aspect and power of purity are two chapters on the nature and visions of Sri Ramakrishna, which more or less contain the gist of whatever the author wants to write about Sri Ramakrishna.

Wanting to know Sri Ramakrishna or the intricacies of his life is, as the author says, akin to a doll made of salt longing to measure the depth of the ocean. But books on Sri Ramakrishna are an enjoyment for the soul, and Professor Sivaramkrishna's book with its wealth of information and mellifluous presentation, provides it

in abundance. Read it seriously to drink in the enjoyment. Keep it as a reference to relive the enjoyment.

Aparna Nair

Thiruvananthapuram



Kena Upanishad

Anirvan

Akshaya Prakashan, 208 M G House, 2 Community Centre, Wazirpur Industrial Area, Delhi 110 052. Website: www.akshayaprakashan.com. 246 pp. ₹ 225.

The Upanishads are a fountainhead of strength and bliss. Equipped with Acharya Shankara's commentary they are all the more enjoyable and elevating. Down the ages many saints and savants have tried to render this literature easy for ordinary minds. Traditional commentators apart, there have also been mystics and scholars who have attempted original interpretations. *Kena Upanishad* by Anirvan, aka Swami Nirvanananda Saraswati, is one such exposition.

The elaborate introduction by Gautam Dharmapal, who translated the book from Bengali, throws light on various topics and tunes the mind to follow the style of explanation in the following pages. Thoughtful inclusion of the life of the author has enriched the volume. Right from explaining the words to the philosophical implication of the verses, the author has maintained originality of thought, a unique aspect of the work. The preface attempts to bring out the deeper dimensions of the peace chant of this Upanishad.

Extensive study of and sound grasp over scriptures are palpable in the pages and the author's in-depth knowledge of the Panini's system of grammar does not go unnoticed. Certain enigmatic verses have also received original treatment. It is difficult, however, to say how well such interpretations will be received by the traditional students of Vedanta. While several subjects are touched upon in the course of explaining the text, one feels that no definite system of thought is built up while commenting on the mantras. Nevertheless, the book is no doubt a good spur for innovative study of scriptures. Swami Vivekananda wanted Indians to think originally, and

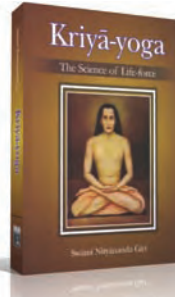
the present edition is a fine example. Though the author has, at times, gone off the beaten track in dealing with the Upanishad, yet unlike some Indian scholars who were swept off their feet by pernicious colonial Indology, his loyalty to Indian culture is charming and wins him plaudits.

Finally, the translation deserves a word of praise. Gautam Dharmapal has not hesitated to transcend the limitations of the English language in coining his own terms and honing the syntax to efficiently convey the most powerful of languages, Sanskrit. For instance *abhinivesha* is translated as 'contracted attachment' (142), 'one has to take the path of unwardisation' (135), and *vi-chiti* has been translated as 'the light of their searching vision' (154).

On the whole, the book is definitely good and deserves to be read.

Brahmachari Bhudevachaitanya

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University,
Belur Math



Kriyā-yoga: The Science of Life-force

Swāmī Nityānanda Giri

Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd, PO Box: 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055. Website: www.mrmlbooks.com. 2013. xxxii + 390 pp. ₹ 995.

India, since the ancient times, has been known as the place of origin and development of yoga. There is a mystique surrounding the science of yoga. This is one of the reasons it has attracted all types of people, some, often misunderstanding and misinterpreting this great science of consciousness. In this age the growing popularity of yoga has made it a household name and it is being again sought by many people as a fashionable way of enhancing human efficiency and health.

Swami Nityananda Giri has given us a new understanding of the ancient techniques while emphasizing its scientific aspect. The author has unravelled the processes of Kriya-yoga in a simple but comprehensive manner using figures and diagrams to augment his explanations. He also clearly eradicates any kind of confusion pertaining to householders practising yoga. In a lucid style he

elaborates the biological principles underlying various steps of the age-old practices.

The author's clarification of the terms *dvija*, twice born, (7) helps the reader to find parity between the social realities and yoga philosophy. One proceeds further to comprehend the deeper meaning of *hamsa*, *prana*, and knowledge, (16–7) their correlation, and the biological analysis of death in the light of yoga. The book is full of such insights into esoteric disciplines.

The book not only provides one with the theoretical concepts of Kriya-yoga but has an extensive step-by-step guidance of how to apply it in our daily life along with ample images. Indeed, this is just a glimpse of the intriguing journey, leaving much to be discovered in the subsequent praxis of yoga.

Moumita Talukdar
Kolkata



**Mantra Yoga and
Primal Sound: Secrets of
Seed (Bija) Mantras**

David Frawley
(Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)

New Age Books, A-44 Naraina Industrial Area, Phase I, New Delhi 110 028.
Website: www.newagebooksindia.com.
2012. 193 pp. ₹ 225.

Japat *siddhi*, perfection through japa, is the well-known utterance of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. Japa or repetition of a holy name is the first exercise prescribed for those who venture into spirituality in almost all religions. There are innumerable mantras in Hinduism covering almost all aspects of daily life. There are special mantras for special occasions, seasons, times of the day, and even for specific daily chores. There are also a wide variety of mantras corresponding to different gods and goddesses.

Ideally, one approaches a guru who is established in a particular mantra by long repetition of the same. The *diksha*, initiation, is a ceremony of receiving the guru's grace by the disciple in the form of a mantra. The guru imparts the mantra, explains its meaning, and teaches how to also meditate on it. In most traditional Vedic and

tantric schools, the guru also explains how to apply a particular mantra for a particular situation. The study of the mechanics of how the mantra works can be called Mantra Yoga.

David Frawley is a renowned teacher of yoga, Ayurveda, Vedic astrology, and an author of several definitive texts in these fields. He follows the tantric approach of Ganapati Muni, the chief disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

In this book, Frawley attempts to put together many facets of Mantra Yoga in brief chapters. He states: 'The first section of the book explores the background of Mantra Yoga, the use of mantra for improving our karmas or actions in life, and the profound philosophy that a mantra is based upon. This is to enable the reader to approach the practicalities of mantras with awareness, insight, and discrimination' (17).

The second section explains the main *bija*, seed, mantras, starting with the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, leading up to the Mantra Purusha, body of sound, which is a very important practice in Mantra Yoga that has not been afforded much examination in the existing literature. Shakti *bija* mantras are also explored in detail, along with their application with the Mantra Purusha. This can help the reader understand the energies and the indications of the *bija* mantras that they are using and how to adapt them for greater efficacy.

The third section explores the main methods of Mantra Yoga starting with mantra and *pranayama*, mantra and traditional kundalini yoga, the use of divine names, and bhakti yoga. It is followed by the application of mantra therapy in the science of Ayurveda, Vedic astrology, *vastu*, directional science, and the Vedic usage of mantras.

The chapters on Ayurveda and Vedic astrology, though brief, bring out Frawley's areas of specialization. The role of primal sound in mantras in the form of 'Om' has been very well written. Mantra Yoga lays emphasis on correct pronunciation of the mantras and for this, knowledge of basic Devanagari is essential. A chapter on the Devanagari script and equivalent English homophones is added to help in the pronunciation of the mantras. 'Mantra Purusha' is perhaps the key chapter of the book in terms of the ritualistic nature of mantras. The whole puja process contains aspects of

Mantra Purusha by way of *pranayama*, visualization of locations indicated by sounds, physical locations for *anga-nyasa*, consecration of the limbs through mantras, and *karana-nyasa*, consecration of the hands, mantra *kavacha*, seeking a shield for protection, and mantra *nyasa*, consecration of the whole body. Puja being regularly performed by many people, this particular chapter could have been more comprehensively dealt.

The book is a revelation in terms of the astonishing width of literature that Frawley touches upon. Volumes can be written on each individual chapter, and though at times highly technical, the book will surely appeal to mantra *upasakas*, practitioners. The sole caveat about the book is the small font size, which makes for hard reading.

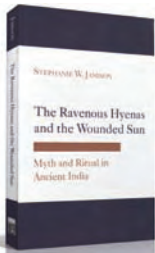
Swami Shrutisiddhananda

New Delhi

with mythology and ancient rituals independently instead of studying them together. The author has, to her credit, combined in her study both mythology and ancient rituals and offers a new methodology of studying ancient texts.

As a salient point in Jamison's analysis it can be mentioned that she examines the recurring myths of 'Indra Fed the *Yatis* to the Hyenas' and 'Svarbhanu Pierced the Sun with Darkness', focussing on their verbal form and ritual setting to give a general interpretation of the myths. Throughout the book the author throws light on some popular figures in Vedic mythology, presents the evolution of this kind of literature, and even brings out parallels with other cultures. This is a well-researched volume and a wonderful addition to Vedic as well as Indic studies.

PB



The Ravenous Hyenas and the Wounded Sun: Myth and Ritual in Ancient India

Stephanie W Jamison

Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.
2013. xix + 335 pp. ₹ 895.

Indian mythological and ritual literature is vast, complex, and speaks of many hidden meanings not discernible to the ordinary reader. Merely describing certain characters and retelling a few stories has filled huge volumes, some of which are right off the mark. Nevertheless, there is a growing interest in many universities and academic circles in the study of various world mythologies, and India, with its huge storehouse of such wealth, is attracting some brilliant academic minds. The author, who has many books on India to her credit, is a Professor of Asian Languages and Cultures and head of the Indo-European Studies at UCLA.

The period 1500–500 BCE was crucial in the formation of the traditional Indian culture that we know today. Jamison delves into this period of Indian religious history and throws light on areas that were not properly understood, especially on Vedic rituals and mythology. Over the years the growing interest has helped unearth a profusion of texts that has in turn fuelled further interest. However, scholars approaching this field dealt



Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture

Anita Mannur

Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.
2013. xiv + 255 pp. ₹ 795.

For centuries food has played a major role in the life of South Asians. This role goes far beyond the palate and sustenance as it impacts in how regional, religious, or national identities are affirmed or resisted. Culinary aspects also reveal race, class, gender, and ethnicity as well as their divisions. It seems the whole of South Asians' social and individual life revolved around culinary arts and products.

Food studies, which emerged in the 1970s, owe much to the work of structuralism, sociologists, and anthropologists. These studies place special emphasis on understanding the role of food in social and group settings.

The book provides food for thought as it considers the metaphors, literature, cinemas, and media that describe the Indian diaspora, for whom food is a central part of cultural imagination. The author is Assistant Professor of English and Asian American Studies at the University of Miami.

The book opens a whole new world for South Asians living anywhere.

PB

REPORTS



Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

Allahabad: A district-level youth convention on 20 October 2013, in which 250 youth delegates participated. A seminar on 'Religious Harmony' on 17 and 18 November, which was inaugurated by Sri Shekhar Dutt, governor of Chhattisgarh, and attended by 300 people. **Bengaluru:** Two spiritual retreats for college students on 22 and 29 August, in which 1,200 students participated. A teachers' convention on 31 August, in which 175 college teachers took part. **Delhi:** A puppet show on Swamiji on 8 November, which was watched by about 600 people, mostly children. Free distribution of the book 'Awakening India' and a DVD containing 30 animated episodes based on Swamiji's life to all the affiliated schools of CBSE, about 13,000, including some 175 in other countries during November. **Institute of Culture, Kolkata:** A youth convention on 10 November, attended by about 2,000 youths. A national

Vivek Chetana, by Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture

seminar on 'Concept of Spirituality in Art: Past, Present and Future' on 14 and 15 November; the inaugural session was attended by 550 people and the academic sessions by 100 delegates and 40 observers. During November the centre launched five Vivekananda Rathas—carriages with statues of Swamiji—named 'Vivek Chetana', which covered all the districts of West Bengal in 15 days. Processions, public meetings, and cultural programmes were held at a number of places. **Kadapa:** A public meeting on 24 November, attended by nearly 500 people. **Khetri:** Special discourses from 23 to 25 September, attended by about 200 persons. **Kochi:** Youth camps at Elamakkara (Kochi) and Chengamanadu (Dist. Ernakulam) on 23 and 24 November respectively, in which 221 youths took part. **Lucknow:** District-level youth conferences in 6 districts of Uttar Pradesh—Agra, Ayodhya, Basti, Ghaziabad, Rai

Bareilly, and Sitapur—in November, attended by about 2,500 youth delegates. **Mangalore:** A value education programme for students on 15 and 16 November, attended by about 1,100 students. A workshop on human values and service on 17 November, in which 180 members of Lions Club took part. A satsang, religious gathering, in the city on 22 November, in which about 180 people participated. **Mumbai:** ‘Interfaith Dialogue’ on 8 and 9 November, in which representatives of ten religions spoke. Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the programme, attended by 70 monks and nearly 1,200 people. An all-Maharashtra devotees’ convention on 10 November, attended by about 1,200 devotees. **Nagpur:** A zonal youth convention on 14 and 15 November, in which about 2,900 youths from five states—Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand—participated.

Narottam Nagar: A special lecture by Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 11 November, attended by about 700 people. Classical music concert on 17 November, attended by about 650 people. **Palai:** Youth camps at two colleges and a school on 17 and 25 October and 14 November. In all, 505 students participated. **Ramharipur:** A special programme comprising lectures and music on 24 November, attended by nearly 900 people. **Ranchi Morabadi:** A district-level youth convention on 16 November at Chakradharpur, in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, attended by about 350 youths. A state-level youth convention on 20 and 21 November, in which 746 youth delegates took part. **Swamiji’s Ancestral House, Kolkata:** On the centre’s initiative four public meetings were held in Kolkata and one in Rampurhat (Birbhum) from 27 October to 18 November. In all,

Youth convention at Nagpur





Programmes at Chicago

about 10,000 people attended the programmes. A public meeting at the centre on 20 November, in which around 700 people took part. **Varanasi Advaita Ashrama:** A national seminar on 'Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to India' on 28 and 29 October, attended by about 350 people. A youth convention on 30 October at a college in Varanasi, attended by nearly 1,700 youths. **Visakhapatnam:** Devotional music concert on 27 October, attended by 300 people. **Vrindaban:** An intra-faith conference from 16 to 18 November, attended by 400 delegates; a number of monks and renowned scholars belonging to different Hindu denominations took part in the discussions spread over in 6 sessions. **Chicago (USA):** Conducted a conference of monastic heads of centres outside India on 8 November at its Ganges retreat, attended by 18 heads. Following the heads' conference, a monastic conference was also held, attended by 34 monks and 11 nuns of various branch centres around the world. Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over both the conferences. He also inaugurated the 'Shrine Trail', a one-mile path through the woods passing by shrines dedicated to different religions. In the evening a special programme comprising speeches and a cultural event was held at the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Lemont, Illinois. An international Vedanta devotees' convention and a daylong programme to commemorate the 120th anniversary of Chicago Parliament

of Religions, 1893, were held at the Hilton Chicago Hotel on 9 and 10 November respectively. Swami Suhitananda and many others addressed the gatherings. The events were attended by 50 monastics and about 900 devotees from different parts of the world.

News from Branch Centres

Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the newly started computer training unit at **Ramakrishna Math, Bagda**, on 8 September.

Swami Gautamananda inaugurated the newly constructed auditorium at **Ramakrishna Math, Vrindaban**, on 15 November.

A new hospital building at **Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati**, was inaugurated on 18 November.

Achievements

Biswajit De, a teacher of the school at **Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar** (Tripura), was presented with CBSE Award to Teachers by the union minister for Human Resource Development at New Delhi on 4 September. The award comprised a certificate, a shawl, and a sum of 25,000 rupees.

Vivekananda Centenary Girls' Higher Secondary School of **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, was awarded the 'All-round Cup' for securing several medals in the H-Zone Athletic Meet organized by the Government of Tamil Nadu on 5 September. A total of 750 students from 25 girls' schools participated in the event.

Dipanjana Kunda, a class-9 student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**, was adjudged runner-up in the National Science Seminar organized by the National Council of Science Museums at Nehru Science Centre, Mumbai, on 8 October.

Selvan D Bhooresh, a student of the boys' higher secondary school at **Ramakrishna Mission, Chengalpattu**, won the first prize in 1,500-metre running race in the 27th Tamil Nadu State Junior Open Athletics Championship held at Karaikudi, Dist. Sivaganga, from 22 to 24 November. Besides, Tamil Nadu Sub Junior Ball Badminton team, having one student each of boys' higher secondary school and matriculation higher secondary school at **Chengalpattu** centre, has won the gold medal and a cash award of 10,000 rupees in the 33rd Sub Junior National Ball Badminton Championship held at Pune. Certificates were issued to all members in the team.

Indian Red Cross Society, Tamil Nadu branch, selected the Vivekananda College of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai**, for the Award of Excellence for mobilizing more than 1,000 voluntary blood donors. Dr K Ro-saiah, governor of Tamil Nadu, handed over a shield and a citation in a function held at Raj Bhavan, Chennai, on 1 October, National Voluntary Blood Donation Day.

Samaj Sevak Shikshana Mandir (of **Ramakrishna Mission, Saradapitha**), has been adjudged the third best Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI) in India under Category-II (over 3 years old RSETIs). A certificate and a trophy were handed over at a function held on 21 November at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi.

Sarada Kindergarten of **Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore**, has received the prestigious ECDA* Outstanding Centre for Teaching and Learning Award 2013, and Miss Pushpa Narayanaswami, the principal of the

kindergarten, has received the ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Leader Award 2013 from the Ministry of Education, Singapore. (*Early Childhood and Development Agency).

Relief

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items, to needy people. **Baranagar Mission**: 51 shirts, 51 pants, 6 T-shirts, 107 umbrellas, 101 buckets, 101 mugs, 107 plates, 107 bowls, and 107 tumblers among 67 families from 18 September to 7 October. **Belgharia**: 20 kg rice, 56 kg biscuits, 1,000 bottles of mineral water (500 ml each), 757 saris, 956 dhotis, 367 frocks, 405 shirts, and 310 uttaris from 10 August to 31 October. **Cherrapunji**: 290 saris and 100 mosquito nets in April and August. **Gadadhar Ashrama**: 110 saris and 102 children's garments in October. **Khetri**: 400 utensil sets (each set containing 3 plates, 2 bowls, 1 tumbler, and 1 spoon) to 200 families on 1 November. **Malda**: 50 dhotis, 150 saris, 100 sets of children's garments, and 10 cycles in September and November. **Ramharipur**: 347 saris and 1,682 children's garments in October. **Sarisha**: 1,173 saris and 35 dhotis in the month of October.

Fire Relief • From 28 to 30 October **Darjeeling** centre distributed building materials (timber, iron rods, and distemper) and 2 utensil sets (each set containing 1 pressure cooker, 1 dekchi, 4 plates, 4 tumblers, 1 karahi, 1 khunti, 1 ladle, 4 bowls, and 1 electric rice cooker) to 2 families whose huts had been gutted in a fire at Chowk Bazar area in Darjeeling.

Phailin Cyclone Relief • **Vishakhapatnam** centre distributed 4,020 kg rice, 800 kg dal, 150 kg potatoes, 150 kg onions, 250 kg peas, 400 kg edible oil, 200 kg salt, 12.5 kg turmeric powder, 40 kg chilli powder, 850 saris, and 850 lungis among 400 cyclone-affected families of 12 villages in Tekkali block of Srikakulam district from 5 to 20 November. Besides, 51 fishing nets were handed over to fishermen of this area. **Bhubaneswar** centre distributed 3,860 kg chira, 965 kg sugar, 1,930 kg soya bean, 965 l mustard oil, 2,895 kg potatoes, 2,895 packets of biscuits, 965 blankets, 965 mosquito nets, 965 torches, and 965 utensil sets (each set containing a cooking vessel, a karahi, a khunti,

2 tumblers, and 2 plates) among 965 cyclone-affected families of 16 villages in Balasore district from 22 to 31 October; and 700 saris, 700 lungis, 1,400 towels, 700 bed sheets, 700 blankets, 700 mosquito nets, 700 utensil sets (each set containing 1 cooking vessel, 1 karahi, 2 plates, and 2 tumblers), 700 kg detergent powder, 700 soap bars, 700 bottles of antiseptic liquid, 700 tins of tooth powder, and 700 torches among 700 affected families of Ramagad and Sana Ramachandrapur panchayats in Ganjam district from 1



Phailin Cyclone relief in Odisha



to 15 November. **Puri Math** centre distributed 230 saris, 230 dhotis, 230 towels, 230 bed sheets, 230 umbrellas, 230 mats, and 230 utensils sets (each set containing a bucket, a ladle, a handi, 2 bowls, 2 plates, 2 tumblers, and a pan) to 230 cyclone-affected families belonging to 3 villages of Krishnaprasad, Puri Sadar, and Brahmagiri blocks in Puri district on 3 and 4 November. **Puri Mission** centre distributed 1,606 saris, 1,710 dhotis, 931 bed sheets, 866 towels, 876 mats, 935 umbrellas, and 882 utensil sets (each set containing 1 handi,




1 karahi, 1 plate, 1 bowl, 1 tumbler, 1 spoon, etc.) to 882 Phailin-affected families belonging to 11 villages of Gopalpur block in Ganjam district and 8 villages of Krishnaprasad block in Puri district from 1 to 5 November. **Saradapitha** centre distributed 800 kg chira, 100 kg sugar, 800 packets of biscuits, and 233,000 halogen tablets among 446 cyclone-affected families of Domjur block in Howrah district on 27 and 28 October.

Storm Relief • In October **Darjeeling** centre distributed 8 blankets, 2 utensil sets (each set containing 1 pressure cooker, 1 dekchi, 4 plates, 4 tumblers, 1 karahi, 1 khunti, 1 ladle, 4 bowls, and 1 electric rice cooker), 14 corrugated sheets, and timber to 2 families at Rangnit Tea Estate in Darjeeling district whose huts had been destroyed by a storm.

Winter Relief • The following centres distributed blankets, woollen garments, and other items to needy people. **Baghbazar**: 1,555 blankets, 650 woollen chaddars, 100 frocks, and 100 sweaters in November. **Cherrapunji**: 2,940 blankets from April to November. **Khetri**: 234 blankets in the month of November. **Malda**: 550 blankets in November. **Narottam Nagar**: 124 blankets on 29 November.

Free Child Eye Care and Eye Camps

Eye camps and child eye care programmes were conducted by several centres of the Ramakrishna Mission. Some of the centres provided patients with free specs and children with vitamins. A cumulative report is given here in two tables, covering the period from 1 December 2012 to 30 November 2013. 

Child Eye Care Programmes		
Centre	Children	Specs
Dehradun	11,561	338
Jamshedpur	2,125	315
Khetri ¹	10,684	1,364
Lucknow	15,293	883
Mayavati	451	-
Rajkot ²	537	698
Ranchi Morabadi ¹	1,365	17
Total	42,016	3,615

¹ Includes October and November 2012

² Includes November 2012

Eye Camps			
Centre	Patients	Specs	Surgeries
Bankura	3,335	675	1,102
Barisal (Bangladesh)	105	-	30
Belgaum ¹	1,760	-	334
Cherrapunji	627	139	4
Chengalpattu and Chennai Math ¹	1,323	572	275
Comilla (Bangladesh)	320	-	29
Garbeta ¹	2,046	235	278
Ghatshila	297	37	118
Jamshedpur ¹	452	37	309
Kamarpukur ²	4,982	649	1,132
Khetri ³	1,522	-	493
Kanpur	100	11	6
Lucknow	13,548	-	2,570
Madurai	974	58	114
Naora	469	50	110
Mayavati	1,490	-	391
Medinipur	772	-	161
Mumbai	689	374	92
Nagpur ³	614	317	57
Patna and Chapra	525	-	87
Porbandar	1,361	-	339
Rajkot ¹	2,053	-	844
Ranchi Sanatorium	260	-	78
Salem	2,080	475	44
Saradapitha ⁴	4,435	-	794
Sargachhi	3,566	48	219
Sikra Kulingram	68	-	21
Silchar	2,960	114	596
Tiruvalla ³	2,062	-	226
Ulsoor	3,298	-	1,408
Vadodara	114	-	22
Seva Prathisthan ⁵	50	50	50
Total	58,257	3,841	12,333

¹ Includes November 2012

² Includes January to November 2012

³ Includes October and November 2012

⁴ Includes April to November 2012

⁵ Includes August to November 2012

Swami Vivekananda Ki Atmakatha

A Film on Swami Vivekananda

Duration: 125 minutes, DVD Format: PAL

A narrative of the extraordinary life of Swami Vivekananda, in his own words

Based on his autobiographical remarks, 'Swami Vivekananda Ki Atmakatha' is a feature film. It is an attempt to recreate the life and times of one of the greatest visionaries through his own words. It begins with the young Swami swimming across the turbulent Indian Ocean, climbing the rock in the middle of the ocean to meditate. In solitude, he realizes his life's mission—to rouse the religious consciousness of the people and to expound his plan for the uplift of the downtrodden masses of India by the application of the principles of Practical Vedanta. Thus begins one of the most adventurous journeys in Indian history.

This is the Hindi version of the English Film 'Vivekananda by Vivekananda' which was released in January 2012 and the same was well received by devotees, admirers of Swamiji, and general public. Tamil version of the Film was also released last month under the title *Vivekanandarai Patri Vivekanandar*.

The DVD (PAL) is available for sale on Chennai Math's online Store at the link:

<http://www.chennaiath.org/istore/product/swami-vivekananda-ki-atmakatha-hindi-movie-dvd/>

It is also downloadable as a Digital Download (MP4) on the online Store at the link:

<http://www.chennaiath.org/istore/product/swami-vivekananda-ki-atmakatha-hindi-movie-download/>

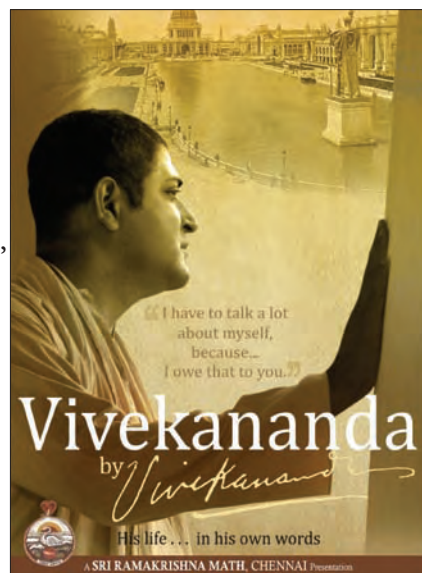
English and Tamil DVDs are available at link:

<http://www.chennaiath.org/istore/category/media-disc/dvds/video-dvds/>

<http://www.chennaiath.org/istore/category/edownloads/video-downloads/>

Concept, Script, Screenplay, and Direction: Karthik Saragur.

DVD Price: ₹ 150/- + Postage: ₹ 50/-for single copy.



For more details, contact:

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600004, Tamil Nadu

Website: www.chennaiath.org Email: mail@chennaiath.org

CONTRIBUTE TO THE PRABUDDHA BHARATA CORPUS FUND!

Contribute your mite to the Prabuddha Bharata Corpus Fund and actively participate in this venture to propagate Indian culture, values, philosophy, and spirituality. Could there be a better way to show your appreciation?

You can send your contributions by cheque or drafts favouring 'Prabuddha Bharata' to 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700014, India or make your donations online at www.advaitaashrama.org. All donations are exempt from Income tax under section 80G.

Name of the Donor:

Amount

235. Mahesh G Joshi, Ahmedabad.

₹ 2,100.00

236. Jaydeo Chokhawala, Mumbai.

₹ 5,000.00

237. V Mohan, Chennai.

₹ 1,200.00

Religious Behaviour & Spiritual Experience

—Asit Chandra Chakraborty

in collaboration with

Swami Priyavratana

The religious have always intrigued the lay. Spiritual life and experience eludes ordinary understanding or so it seems. Senses fail to fathom spiritual truths. Science seems to be at loggerheads with spirituality. Is there any meeting ground? Can spiritual truths be investigated by a scientific mind using scientific techniques? Why do people take to spiritual life? Is there any scientific truth behind supra-normal experiences? These and other questions have been explored in this book.

Pages: 340 | Price: ₹ 100 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 35



Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

WORKS OF SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

Abhedananda in India (in 1906)	100.00
An Introduction to the Philosophy of Panchadasi	10.00
A Study of Heliocentric Science	100.00
Attitude of Vedanta Towards Religion	50.00
Bhagavad Gita, the Divine Message (in 2 parts)	300.00
Christian Science and Vedanta	10.00
Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda (eleven vols.)	2000.00
Divine Heritage of Man	40.00
Doctrine of Karma	60.00
Epistles	98.00
Goddess Durga : The Divine Energy	15.00
Great Saviours of the World	100.00
How to be a Yogi	60.00
Human Affection and Divine Love	15.00
Ideal of Education	25.00
India and Her People	35.00
Leaves From My Diary	50.00
Life Beyond Death	100.00
My Life Story	98.00
Mystery of Death	120.00
Path of Realization	60.00

Ramakrishna Kathamrita and Ramakrishna	70.00
Reincarnation	60.00
Religion of the 20th Century	15.00
Religion, Revelation and God	80.00
Religion of the 20th Century	15.00
Science of Psychic Phenomena	60.00
Self-Knowledge	60.00
Steps Towards Perfection	20.00
Songs Divine	25.00
Spiritual Sayings of Ramakrishna	65.00
Spiritual Unfoldment	25.00
Swami Vivekananda and His Work	7.00
Thoughts on Philosophy and Religion	60.00
Thoughts on Sankhya, Buddhism and Vedanta	50.00
True Psychology	80.00
Universal Religion and Vedanta	50.00
Why a Hindu Accepts Christ and Rejects Churchianity	15.00
Women's Place in Hindu Religion	10.00
Works of Swami Abhedananda (in 2 parts) Abridged	500.00
Yoga, Its Theory and Practice	80.00
Yoga Psychology	100.00
Vedanta Philosophy	15.00

WORKS OF SWAMI PRAJNANANANDA

An Enquiry into Psychology, Soul and Absolute	70.00
Christ the Saviour and Christ Myth	140.00
Form and Function of Music in Ancient India (2 vols.)	700.00
History of Indian Music (2 vols.)	400.00
Is a Jivanmukta Subject to Ignorance	45.00
Music of the South Asian Peoples	250.00
Music of The Nations	200.00

Philosophy of Progress and Perfection	70.00
Sangitasara Samgraha of Sri Ghanasyamadasa	50.00
Thoughts on Yoga, Upanishad and Gita	70.00
The Philosophical Ideas of Swami Abhedananda	100.00
The Social and Historical Values of Ragas and Raginis	200.00



RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA MATH PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT

19A & B, RAJA RAJKRISHNA STREET, KOLKATA-700 006, INDIA

☎ : (033) 2555 7300 & 2555-8292



Does your organization have
an in-house magazine?

Would you like your magazine to be applauded
and assessed by a stalwart jury??

**Have you heard of the
ICE Awards???**

*The most coveted recognition for
internal communication*

Join us in celebrating
In-house communication Excellence!!

Visit www.iceawards.in or
write to response@iceawards.in



COME! NURTURE THESE FLOWERS!

The Ashrama has been running a free hostel for underprivileged children from classes V to X since 1936. They are provided with food, uniform, accommodation and education up to Xth std. absolutely free of cost. They are admitted in the school managed by the Ashrama within its campus.

There is an urgent need for repair and renovation of the old hostel buildings and also creating a 'Hostel Corpus Fund' of ` 2 crore for smoothly maintaining the hostel with 100 boys. We appeal to the generous public, friends, and well wishers to donate liberally for this most essential educational project.

You are also welcome to donate towards various other regular activities: a) Daily Puja & Seva; b) General Maintenance of the Ashrama; c) Charitable Dispensary; d) Widow's Welfare. Donations towards the activities of the Ashrama are exempt from Income Tax under section 80G.

Cheques/Bank Drafts/M.O. may be drawn in favour of 'Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady' and sent to the below address. Donors from overseas can send their contributions in foreign currency online to our Account No 338602010005806 while Indian donors can send their donations to the Account No 338602010009164 at Union Bank of India, Kalady (IFSC Code: UBIN0533866).

Swami Amaleshananda
Adhyaksha



Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama

(Hqs. Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Belur Math)

PO Kalady, Ernakulam-683574 • Ph:0484-2462345; 09447051231 • Email: srkaadv@dataone.in

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Phailin Cyclone Relief Work

By RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, BELUR MATH

Brief Report as on 03.11.2013

You must be well aware of the ravaging cyclone *Phailin* which struck the eastern coast of India in mid-October and caused widespread devastation in its wake. Phailin, with its enormous potential of causing large-scale devastation, reminded us of the unfortunate *Odisha Super Cyclone* of 1999. Though extensive precautions taken by the local governments kept the loss of human lives to a minimum, there has been an appalling destruction of establishment and property in **Andhra Pradesh** and **Odisha**, while it also indirectly caused devastation in **West Bengal**.

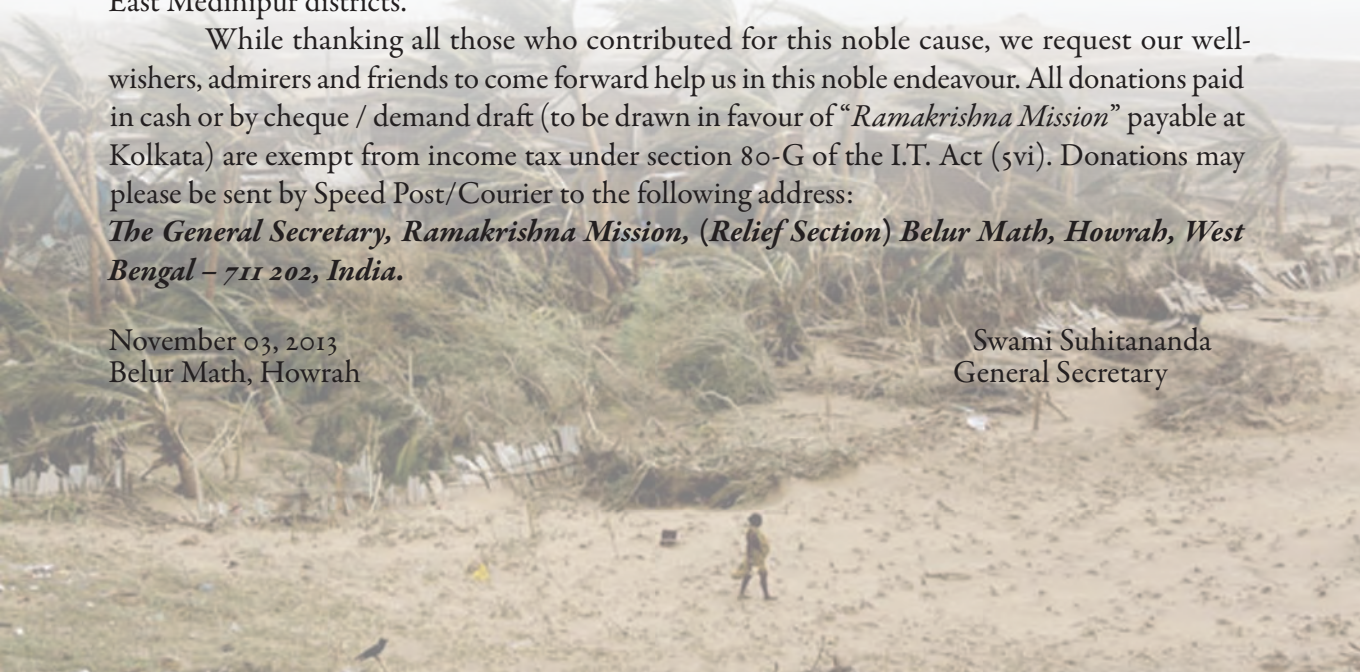
As on previous occasions, this time also, Ramakrishna Mission has promptly responded to the occasion and started relief work in the affected areas. According to recent reports from our survey team, the local Government is conducting relief work in most of the affected areas in the form of distribution of food and other essential goods. However, they have requested us to conduct relief work in those areas which they are not able to reach. Accordingly, our **Vishakhapatnam** centre has made arrangements to distribute fishing nets and to repair the fishing boats of fishermen in the Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh. **Bhubaneshwar**, **Kothar**, **Puri Math**, and **Puri Mission** centres in Odisha are serving cooked food and distributing dry food materials, clothing, blankets, utensils, among thousands of affected families in Baripada in Mayurbhanj district, Gopalpur and Berhampur in Ganjam district and Chilka in Puri district. Our **Antpur** and **Tamluk** centres are conducting primary relief work in Howrah, Hooghly and East Medinipur districts.

While thanking all those who contributed for this noble cause, we request our well-wishers, admirers and friends to come forward help us in this noble endeavour. All donations paid in cash or by cheque / demand draft (to be drawn in favour of “*Ramakrishna Mission*” payable at Kolkata) are exempt from income tax under section 80-G of the I.T. Act (5vi). Donations may please be sent by Speed Post/Courier to the following address:

The General Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, (Relief Section) Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal – 711 202, India.

November 03, 2013
Belur Math, Howrah

Swami Suhitananda
General Secretary



My First Visit to Kamarpukur and Jayrambati

Swami Vireswarananda
(Tenth President, Ramakrishna Math & Mission)



It was in mid-summer in 1916 that I first came to Belur Math and stayed there for nearly two months before I went to see the Mother. As far as I remember, I went to Jayrambati in the month of June. Swami Premanandaji introduced me to a gentleman who was going there. He gave a letter to the Holy Mother and we both started for Jayrambati. We went to the Howrah Maidan Martin Co. Railway Station and from there we took the train and went to Champadanga reaching there late in the night. Martin Co. Railway speed was very slow—even slower than the tram-car. There were two other young men who travelled by the same train and met us at Champadanga. All of us spent the night at the station which was only a half covered room and started for Jayrambati on the next day. After we had gone some distance one of our friends from Calcutta (he later became Swami Satprakashananda and was for many years in charge of our St. Louis Centre in U.S.A) fell ill with dysentery and he and his friend had to return to Calcutta. We two (myself and the devotee) resumed our journey to the Mother's house.

When we reached the Arambagh river it was already night and we could not proceed to Kamarpukur. We spent that night on the river bank. It was very cool during the night though it was summer and there were also other people for company, the cart-men with their bullock-carts. Early in the morning we got up and went to Kamarpukur and when we reached there we first met Shibuda. He was smoking a hookah and we were made to sit in the reception room. Then he went inside and arranged for our food. After lunch, we took a little rest and proceeded to Jayrambati. When we reached Jayrambati it was 4 or 4.30 pm and we were taken to see the Holy Mother. We went inside her room. We stayed in a room in the present new house of the Holy Mother which became a baithakkhana (visitor's room) outside the house. At that time the new house was under construction.

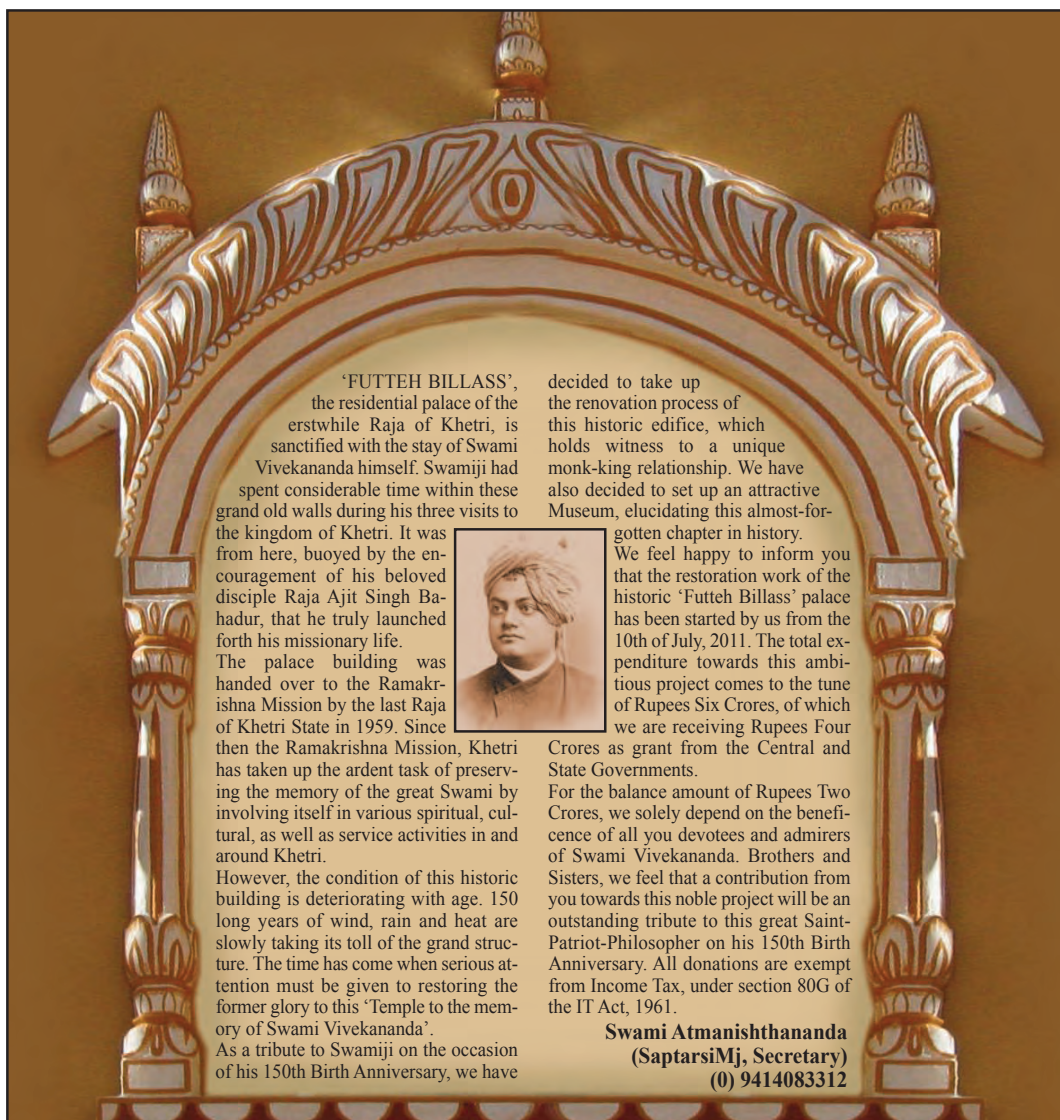
When we were taken to the Mother she was sitting in her old house. Nobody else was there, probably because the ladies had retired as the gentlemen were coming in. The Mother was sitting on the verandah dressing vegetables for the dinner. A gentleman told her about the letter from Swami Premananda. She asked one of the Brahmacharins to read out the letter. It was read out to her. Then she said 'All right, they will have their diksha tomorrow'. And we came back to our room.

Next day we were ready for the diksha. After Mother had performed her morning puja of Thakur, she sent for us, one by one, and we got our diksha. Normally she gave diksha only after Thakur puja but she had no hard and fast rules about it. She gave diksha under any condition. It may be remembered that she gave diksha to a porter on the Vishnupur railway station platform itself. When she was very seriously ill at Udbodhan House, one day a Parsi young man came there to see her and get initiation. At that time no nobody was allowed to see the Mother as she was seriously ill. This young man was sitting downstairs and was not allowed to go upstairs to see the Mother but She somehow got scent of this boy's arrival and asked someone to bring him to her. He was initiated by the Mother and sent downstairs. When Swami Saradananda came to know of this, he said 'If Mother desires to have a Parsi disciple, what can I say?' This young man was none other than the well-known film actor and producer in Bombay, Sri Sohrab Modi. In this way she was never hesitant to initiate anybody at any moment, unto the last.

(Based on a talk delivered by Revered Maharaj at Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi on 14 December 1981 and quoted from 'Sri Sarada Devi: The Great Wonder' compiled and edited by Swami Budhananda and Swami Harshananda, Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, First Edition, 1984, pages 37–39).

In reverential homage

Bani, Bhaskar, Debasree, Devajit & Ruchira Roy, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi.



'FUTTEH BILLASS', the residential palace of the erstwhile Raja of Khetri, is sanctified with the stay of Swami Vivekananda himself. Swamiji had spent considerable time within these grand old walls during his three visits to the kingdom of Khetri. It was from here, buoyed by the encouragement of his beloved disciple Raja Ajit Singh Bahadur, that he truly launched forth his missionary life. The palace building was handed over to the Ramakrishna Mission by the last Raja of Khetri State in 1959. Since then the Ramakrishna Mission, Khetri has taken up the ardent task of preserving the memory of the great Swami by involving itself in various spiritual, cultural, as well as service activities in and around Khetri.

However, the condition of this historic building is deteriorating with age. 150 long years of wind, rain and heat are slowly taking its toll of the grand structure. The time has come when serious attention must be given to restoring the former glory to this 'Temple to the memory of Swami Vivekananda'. As a tribute to Swamiji on the occasion of his 150th Birth Anniversary, we have decided to take up the renovation process of this historic edifice, which holds witness to a unique monk-king relationship. We have also decided to set up an attractive Museum, elucidating this almost-forgotten chapter in history.

We feel happy to inform you that the restoration work of the historic 'Futteh Billass' palace has been started by us from the 10th of July, 2011. The total expenditure towards this ambitious project comes to the tune of Rupees Six Crores, of which we are receiving Rupees Four Crores as grant from the Central and State Governments.

For the balance amount of Rupees Two Crores, we solely depend on the beneficence of all you devotees and admirers of Swami Vivekananda. Brothers and Sisters, we feel that a contribution from you towards this noble project will be an outstanding tribute to this great Saint-Patriot-Philosopher on his 150th Birth Anniversary. All donations are exempt from Income Tax, under section 80G of the IT Act, 1961.

Swami Atmanishthananda
(SaptarsiMj, Secretary)
(0) 9414083312

For direct transfer of contribution please inform your name & address by a letter/ e-mail / SMS

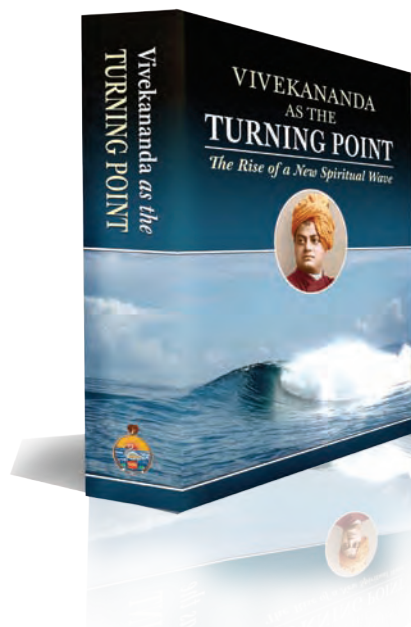
Bank Name	State Bank Of India	State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur
A/c. Name	Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Smriti Mandir	
A/c Number	31811244628	51031902720
A/c Type	Savings	Savings
Branch Address	Khetri - 333503	Khetri - 333503
Branch Code	13526	10132
RTGS/NEFT Code	SBIN0013526	SBBJ0010132



A/c payee Cheque/Draft may be issued in favour of "RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, KHETRI"
Address : Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Smriti Mandir
P.O. Khetri, Dt. Jhunjhunu Rajasthan. Pin - 333503, Phone : 01593-234312
email : rkmkhetri@gmail.com website : www.rkmissionkhetri.org

Vivekananda as the Turning Point

—A compilation



Today it is absolutely imperative for the country and the world to be informed about Vivekananda's life-giving ideas and contributions. In the last hundred years or more, a great change has come about in the way human beings understand the world and each other. It has been a phenomenon of global dimension, silently working on a subtle plane. If we track the source of this phenomenon, we shall be led to two names: Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

As the title of the book suggests, Vivekananda is presented here as a 'TURNING POINT' in the modern history.

Pages: xvi + 668 | Price: ₹ 250 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 50

Patanjali Yoga Sutra—Hindi Audio DVD

—Swami Brahmeshananda

The common aim of Indian philosophies is to attain liberation. Yoga is a means of liberation. Patanjali Yoga Sutra is the seminal text on Yoga. Swami Brahmeshananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and a former editor of the English journal Vedanta Kesari, lucidly explains the sutra in detail.

This DVD is an attempt to bring out the practical aspects of the Yoga philosophy for the benefit of the listeners.



Duration: 60 Hours | Price: ₹ 100 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 60



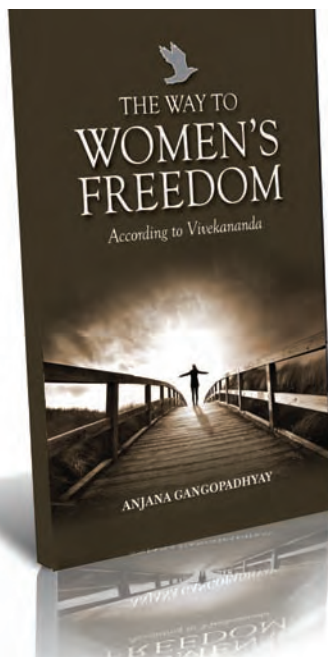
Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

The Way to Women's Freedom

Anjana Gangopadhyay



Women everywhere have suffered for ages from the disabilities and violations perpetrated by men. This issue has been studied and researched from various angles by scholars and thinkers all over the world. Large numbers of books have been written and there have been opinions of diverging kinds. Swami Vivekananda was one of the great personalities of the nineteenth century who had incisive views on this matter. The author has carefully collected the important utterances of Swami Vivekananda and presented them in such a manner that a clear picture of the FREE, INDEPENDENT WOMAN emerges. We are sure this book will open the eyes of womenfolk and show them the way to 'true freedom' from their present state.

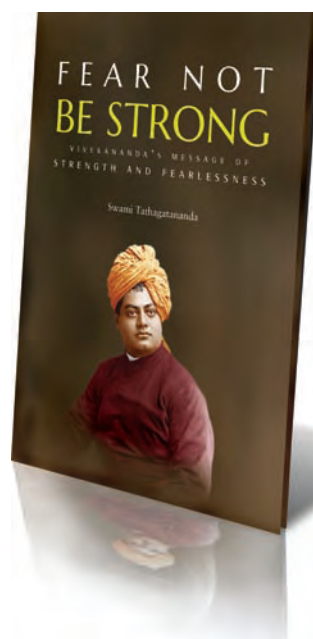
Pages: 64 | Price: ₹ 30 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 30

Fear Not, Be Strong

—Swami Tathagatananda

Strength and fearlessness are the two prime virtues, among the others, which are the markers of health of a human being (both man and woman) and society. Every crime, antisocial and inhuman act is the outcome of lack of true strength and fearlessness. But what do we mean by strength, and what does fearlessness connote? Swami Tathagatananda has presented Vivekananda's views on this matter, which, we are sure, will shed new light on our understanding of these eternal virtues.

Pages: 56 | Price: ₹ 20 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 30



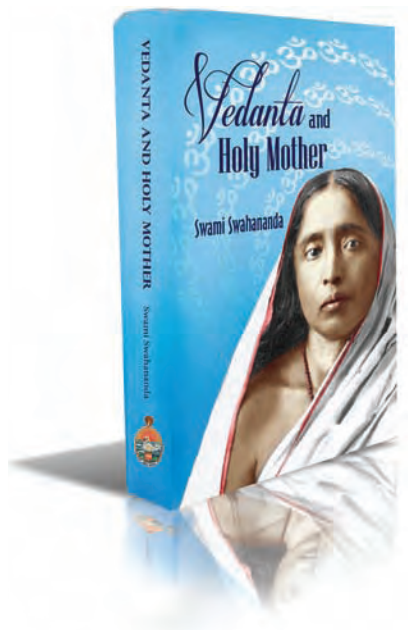
Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

Vedanta and Holy Mother

—Swami Swahananda



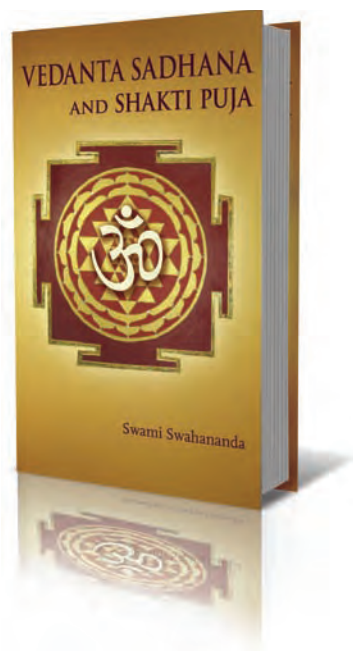
This book, 'Vedanta and Holy Mother', has been compiled mostly from published articles in journals and books. These are a collection of self contained articles and not a planned book. Those who are interested in a particular topic and not its entire philosophy or background may find these separate treatments more useful. These topics had been dealt with separately as lectures, essays, television talks and University lectures. There will be repetitions of ideas and language.

Pages: 360 | Price: ₹ 80 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 40

Vedanta Sadhana and Shakti Puja

—Swami Swahananda

Swami Swahananda was a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and has spread the message of Vedanta in the west for many decades. This book is a collection of his writings and speeches compiled by his disciples and admirers. We are happy to bring this volume to the readers who will be benefited by the insight of the author.



Pages: 336 | Price: ₹ 70 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 40



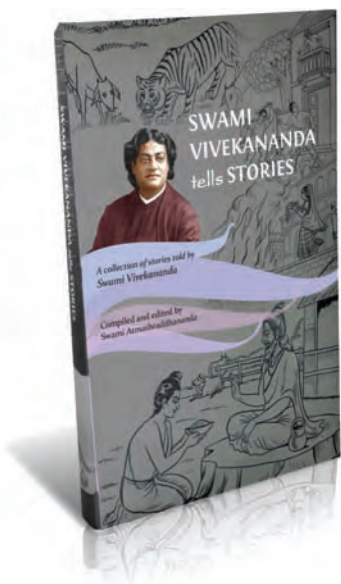
Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

Swami Vivekananda Tells Stories

Compiled and Edited by Swami Atmashraddhananda



Swamiji was a wonderful storyteller. His talks and writings are interspersed with numerous anecdotes and illustrations. Some of these are well-known, while others are not, but they are all relevant and thought-provoking, revealing his profound knowledge of human nature—its potential and its limitations. This collection contains most of the stories from his nine-volume Complete Works published by us. The 106 stories contained in this volume have been classified under 10 headings. Some are just a paragraph, while others go on for several pages, but all are sure to give readers fresh insights. These stories have been illustrated with line drawings.

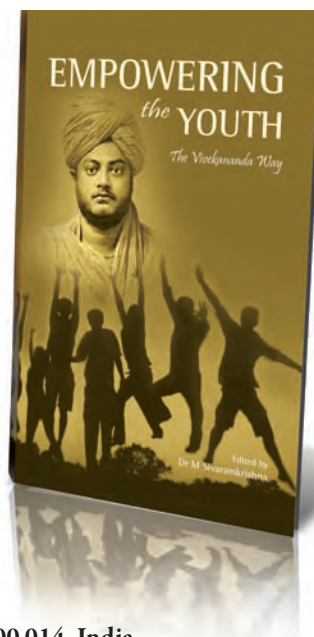
Pages: 224 | Price: ₹ 70 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 35

Empowering the Youth—The Vivekananda Way

Edited by Dr M Sivaramkrishna

The idea behind this book is to place Swamiji's teachings in the context of today's problems, and urge the youth to find methods to put the teachings into practice. The second part of the book, which is a workbook, urges the reader to assimilate and understand various incidents from Swamiji's life based on his teachings. For each incident, there is a paragraph in his own words followed by questions. We believe this book will help the youth of today to realise the practical value of Swami Vivekananda's teachings and also to inspire them to put his precepts into practice.

Pages: 72 | Price: ₹ 30 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 30



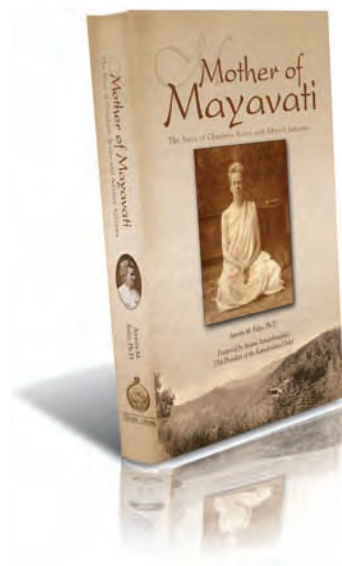
Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

Mother of Mayavati

—Amrita M. Salm



Pages: xxiv + 400 | Price: ₹ 200
Packing & Postage: ₹ 45

Swami Vivekananda dreamt of starting a centre on the Himalayan heights dedicated to Advaita philosophy alone. Here the East and the West would meet to give full and free expression to the Highest Truth of Non-dualism. His dream was actualized by a couple from England, Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, especially by the latter. Soon after the founding of Mayavati Advaita Ashrama, Mr. Sevier passed away. Then it was Mrs. Sevier who, through her gritty determination and lofty character, built and consolidated the centre. In course of her amazing life there, she eventually emerged to become the 'Mother of Mayavati'.

This is the inspiring story of Mrs. Sevier's life—a life exemplifying complete dedication. And with her life-story is entwined the early stages of the history of Advaita Ashrama. The book contains also her letters and brilliant articles, and even important documents related to her and the centre. Forty-nine colourful pictures have also been included, further embellishing the beauty and worth of the book.

Vivekananda in Pictures

Photographs remind us of personalities. Prophets have a striking personality which is reflected to some extent in their images. We are fortunate that we have many photographs of Swami Vivekananda, through which we can get a glimpse of his magnetic bearing. All his original photographs are in black and white. We have digitally re-mastered some of these photographs into colour. We are happy to present them in this book and are sure that they will be received well by his admirers. This book is being published on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.



Pages: 40 | Price: ₹ 35 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 30



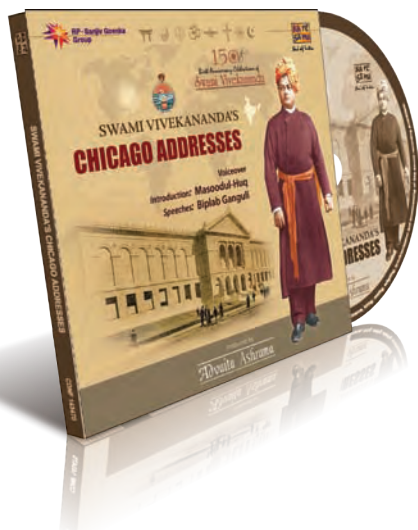
Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

Chicago Addresses of Swami Vivekananda

An Audiobook



Produced by Advaita Ashrama in collaboration with Saregama Ltd, this is an audiobook containing readings of the addresses of Swami Vivekananda delivered at the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893. It contains the comments of various thinkers on Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions and an introduction to the audiobook. The speeches have been read by Sri Biplab Ganguli. The comments have been read by Sri Masoodul Haq and the introduction has been given by Swami Atmarupananda.

Price: ₹ 99 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 60

Strength Is Life Ebooks by Swami Vivekananda

This CD contains the e-book files of six books by Swami Vivekananda: *Buddha and His Message*, *Personality Development*, *Essentials of Hinduism*, *Chicago Addresses*, *My Idea of Education*, *Rebuild India*. All popular e-book formats are included and these files can be read by nearly all e-book readers and tablets. Containing an user-friendly interface this disk can be used in Windows and Mac Operating Systems.



Price: ₹ 100
Packing & Postage: ₹ 60



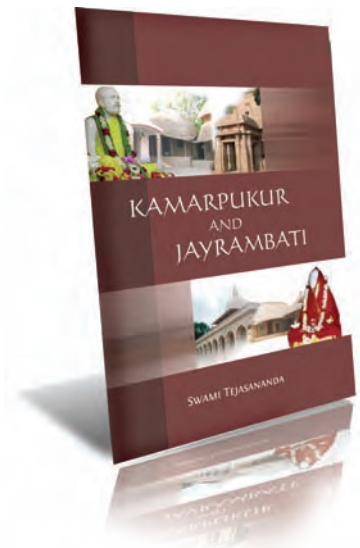
Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

Kamarpukur and Jayrambati

by Swami Tejasananda



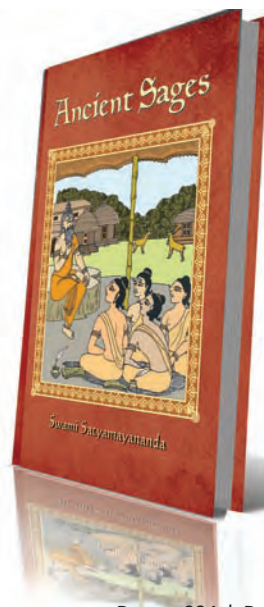
Sri Ramakrishna and his consort, Sri Sarada Devi, were prophets, unparalleled in the history of spirituality, who have left us a legacy of religious harmony and love much needed in the present era. The places where they were born, Kamarpukur and Jayrambati, bear witness to the unique phenomenon of their lives—lives of intense spiritual realization and universal love. The soil, stones, trees, air, and streams of these two pilgrimage centres continue to remind us that here once walked divinities on earth. These places invite us to take a dip in the ocean of spirituality and merge with the source of infinite bliss. This book is a combined edition of two booklets, Holy Kamarpukur and Holy Jayrambati, originally published by the centres of the Ramakrishna Order at Kamarpukur and Jayrambati.

Pages: 76 | Price: ₹ 50 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 30

Ancient Sages

by Swami Satyamayananda

While the present generation works hard for a better future, we should not forget our glorious past and spiritual legacy, as it is pride in our ancestors that inspires us to strive to create a better country for those coming after us. That is why we need to become familiar with the lives of these ancient sages, and it is also why we should pass on this legacy to the coming generations. It is with this in mind that we present this book to our readers. Indian mythology is replete with accounts of sages and seers, so some of these stories have been presented here in a short form.



Pages: 224 | Price: ₹ 60
Packing & Postage: ₹ 35



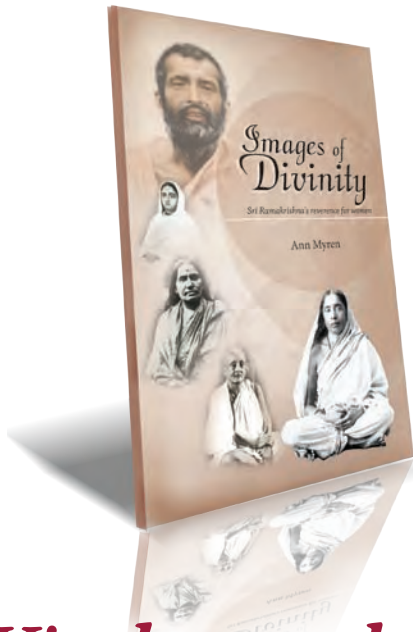
Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

Images of Divinity

by Ann Myren



A careful examination of the lives of the women who knew Sri Ramakrishna and of their relationship to him will demonstrate the relevance and importance of his life and teachings for the women of this age. By examining Sri Ramakrishna's life, we can see how he regarded the feminine. Only through such an analysis can we understand how women can correctly deal with this new age.

The author, Ann Myren, was devoted to the cause of Vedanta and had contributed articles in the journals of the Ramakrishna Order. This book is a result of her ideas developed over a lifetime.

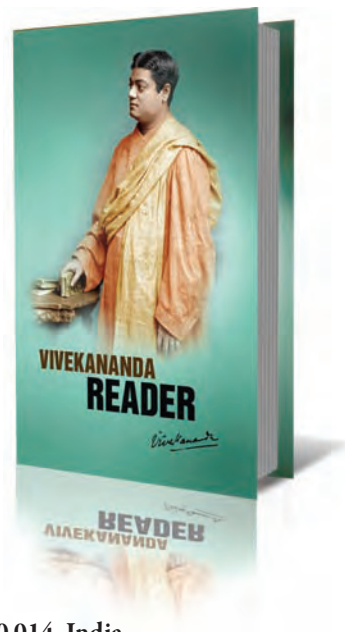
Pages: 140 | Price: ₹ 50 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 35

Vivekananda Reader

Compiled by Dr M Sivaramkrishna
& Edited by Swami Narasimhananda

The life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda can be of immense benefit and help to all people. They contain the distilled essence of India's spiritual treasures explained in the simplest language in the light of modern rational thought and science. They are universal in their scope and are meant for all people belonging to all strata of society, all religions, and all races. The present book is compiled from the 9-volume Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.

Pages: 360 | Price: ₹ 80 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 40



Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

The Ships of Vivekananda

by **Somenath Mukherjee**



In this book the author, Sri Somenath Mukherjee, a researcher on the life of Swami Vivekananda, has presented a broad canvas wherein the history, akin to biography, of all the eleven ships which took the swami around the seven seas during his two Western visits are threaded together with the sequence of events in his life in between those voyages. Besides, in the Epilogue the author has convincingly documented the enormous impact of the swami on the stirring sea voyage movement in the last decade of nineteenth century.

Pages: 136 | Price: ₹ 55 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 35

Sannyasa Upanishads

—Translated by **Swami Atmapriyananda**

The present book containing select minor Upanishads which have a special bearing on renunciation or sannyasa, and hence are called Sannyasa Upanishads. They contain inspiring passages revealing the sublime thoughts of our ancient sages on the life of renunciation, asceticism, and complete absorption in Brahman, the Supreme Reality, Existence-Awareness-Joy, satchidananda. The present volume is the first in the series, and a second volume is under preparation. Elaborate explanatory notes have been added based upon, and in the light of, the commentaries by Upanishad Brahmayogin and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda.



Pages: 144 | Price: ₹ 70 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 35

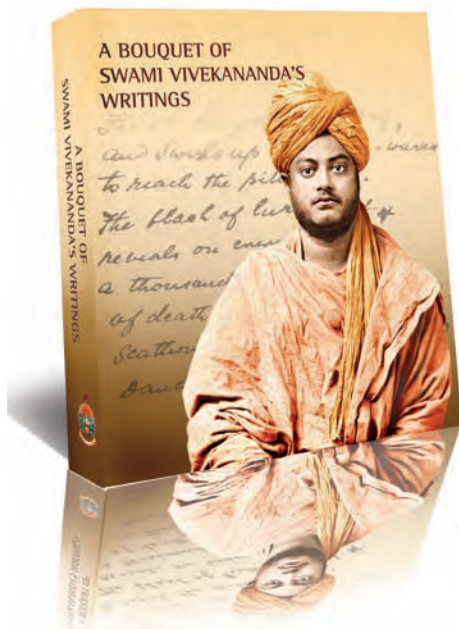


Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

A Bouquet of Swami Vivekananda's Writings



Great prophets speak not only through their writings but also through the artefacts which preserve their memories. Original handwritten manuscripts are a type of such artefacts. When we read Swami Vivekananda's writings in his own hand after so many years of his passing away, we feel the freshness and vibrancy of his message much more palpably. These manuscripts, which are world treasures, speak to each one of us directly, as if they were written specially for the reader.

We are happy to publish this bouquet of manuscripts on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda and we are sure that the readers will welcome this endeavour.

Pages: 310 | Price: ₹ 500 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 60

A Guide to Spiritual Life

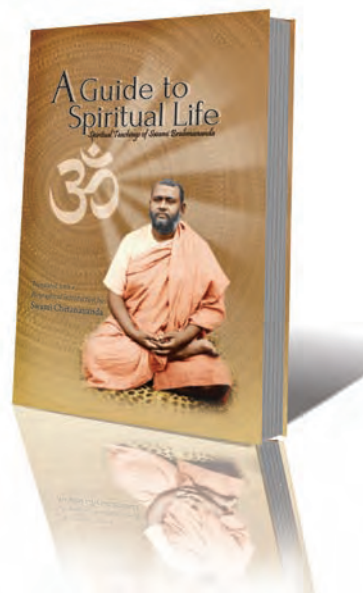
Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda

—Translated by Swami Chetanananda

Swami Brahmananda was a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and was considered his spiritual son. His teachings emphasise on the necessity of spiritual practice and assure us of their sure results.

We hope that this book will be well received by the readers.

Pages: 304 | Price: ₹ 100 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 35



Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

Stand out
from the crowd.
Advertise with us.



Prabuddha Bharata takes varied products to audiences across the globe. With your advertisement in this heritage journal, you can rest assured that your quality product will reach quality buyers.

ADVERTISEMENT RATES

Number of Insertions	One	Three	Six	Twelve
• Half Page	₹ 1500	4000	7500	13000
• Full Page	₹ 2500	6500	12000	22000
• 2nd/3rd Cover	₹ 3000	8000	15000	27000
• Special Page	₹ 5000	13500	25000	45000

MECHANICAL DATA

Size of Journal	24 cm x 18 cm
Print Area	20 cm x 14 cm
Medium of Printing	Photo Offset
Acceptable form of Advertisement Matter	(Print / CD / Film)

Send your advertisement matter to: **ADVAITA ASHRAMA**
5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India
 Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483
 E-mail: mail@advaitaashrama.org